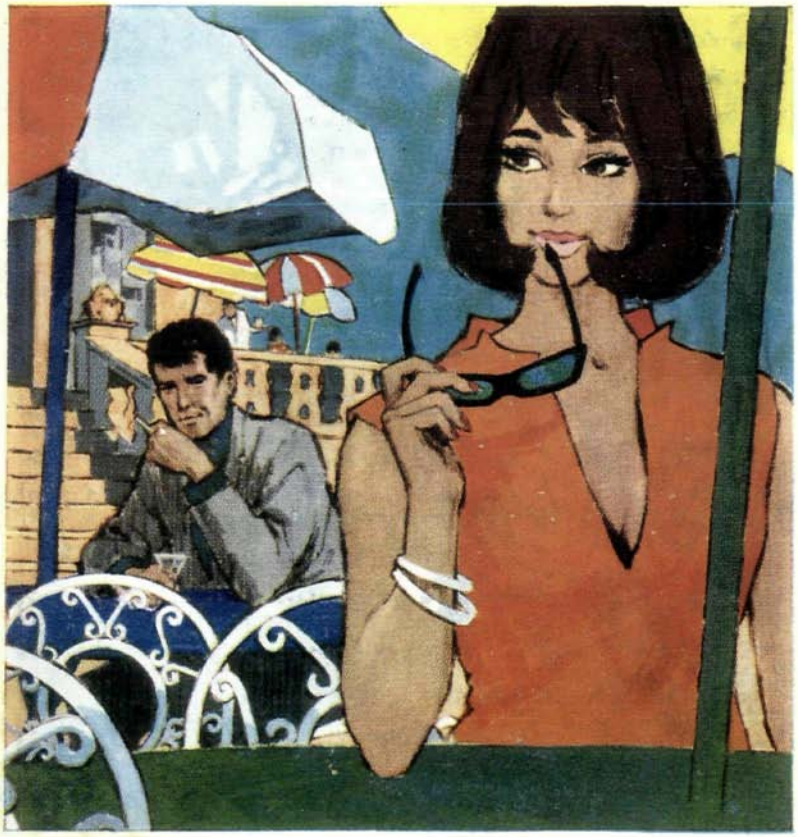
argosy

SUMMER FICTION BY 12 OF TODAY'S AUTHORS



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Vol. XXVI No. 7 Cover by Jon Davis JULY 1965

Over Now to You	William Saroyan	2
Innocent One	Evan Hunter	5
Medici Ear-ring	Winston Graham *Illustration by Jack Keay*	11
The Blue Table	William Scott *Cover and Illustration by Jon Davis*	28
You Meet Such Interesting People!	*Decoration by Porter-G*	42
Roundest Stone on the Island	John Cohane	45
The True Death of Juanito Rodriguez	Leigh Brackett *Illustration by M. Whittlesea*	54
A Drop of the Crathur	John D. Sheridan *Decorations by Fred Reynolds*	64
Seeds of Time	Youngman Carter	67
Firing Squad	Joseph Kessel *Decoration by Bill Linden*	74
No Picnic!	*Decoration by Biro*	90
Chinoiserie	Helen McCloy *Illustration by Langhammer*	92
Spiriting of Sheba	Bernard Williams *Drawings by Raymond Sheppard*	114
The Thousand Doors (Second Part)	Abraham Rothberg *Illustration by De Gasperi*	122
Leisure-Pleasure	*Decorations by Fred Reynolds* *Contributors: Charles Bryant, Jan Dehane, Keith Fletcher, John Baker White*	160
Argosy Crossword		168

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WHAT I think about short stories

by

William Saroyan

THE story is an infinite thing. It is astonishing how little its infinitude is demonstrated by writers, and how few kinds of it are achieved by any given writer, myself included, myself *especially*.

There is a little variety in the subject matter of stories, but there is nowhere near enough in so far as other things are concerned. Livingness is inexhaustible, and the livingest form of writing is the story. If there is a writer, and he is willing, the story can accommodate any order, any size, any style, and any *repudiation* of these.

It is the most natural of forms, coming directly from the people talking to one another, from gossip, from jokes, from mimicry, from improvisation, from the telling of stories by skilled storytellers long before writing, long before print and paper and the printing press, long before literature. Every family had at least one good storyteller, many had several, and in a few families everybody was good at it.

What is a story for? It is for telling, and for hearing. After that it is for as many things as there are, and for as many that need to become. For fun, for entertainment, for zest, for diversion, for instruction, for anything, for everything. A story can be to celebrate the living, to mourn the dead, and frequently both at the same time. It can be a grand curse, or a joyous prayer.

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I felt all this strongly in 1934, I feel it even more strongly today, but I felt then and I feel now, the enormity of my own neglect to demonstrate all this, my own incredible, unaccountable failure. What the devil happened? What could I have been thinking?

There are no excuses for me, or for any of the other writers. We goofed.

There may be an explanation, however. This oldest of forms, this truest, certainly came to be considered a lesser order of writing—hardly possible, for instance, to be considered a big form, a major form, as the saying is. The novel was that form. Many a good writer of stories was bullied into believing that nothing he might ever do in that form could be considered major. Unless he wrote a good novel, he didn't really count as a writer. Publishers sponsored this bogus and unfortunate theory, and literary critics supported it.

The fact remains just the same that the long novels, the dozens of them, by the honoured novelists, rather suddenly become unreadable, and at best, patches are removed from them for study—patches that are in essence short stories.

On the other hand a good short story tends to remain for ever readable, and frequently becomes more and more readable as time goes by, more enjoyable, more significantly itself.

My own theory is that the story should have no limitations of any kind, provided only that it lives, however unaccountably.

Form, as such, impels much too much comfort in the writer. It gives him a feeling of being safe at home, and this has got to make for repetitiousness, at the very least. It both permits and compels the writer to know what he is doing, and it prevents the accidental, which almost always turns out to be the inevitable, too long postponed.

But doesn't this apply to all writing? It *could* perhaps, except for the element of time that is involved, in the listener to a told story, or in the reader of a written one. An hour is just about enough for anybody who is himself busy being alive, an hour at a time now and then, possibly daily, possibly weekly, possibly every once in a while. The reading of a long novel is a great comfort to many people, as if in the reading they were recuperating for themselves, and this is a rather valuable thing for people always to have. It's not unlike always having sleep to sleep.

Having life to live, however, makes the story. It is *for* that, and moves with it, to it, through it, and away.

But this is no defence of the story, and no attack upon the

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novel. The story needs no defence, the novel cannot be attacked. Each lives, at its best, in the livingness of the race itself.

Both of my grandmothers were great storytellers. Both were illiterate, although each spoke three languages fluently. The banishment of illiteracy does not make a better order of livingness inevitable, and it frequently makes growing into livingness impossible.

During the thirty years since the publication of my first book I know all too well what happened. I was so busy living I almost forgot how *not* to write. The trouble is that if you are skilled at it, even when you write as you ought not to write, when you keep to the forms, the stuff is all right, it seems to be more than all right now and then, except that in your heart, then and years later, you know you could have done it better, you could have refused to be bullied, by your experience, your skill, your love of comfort, your laziness, or by the theories of readers, critics, editors and publishers. You didn't because you didn't.

And the hell with it. One good story about somebody with large ears or a bad cough, who barks when he talks, makes all the theorising about stories only a big laugh. One great story makes a lifetime memorable, even if the story appears to be about a mouse, a hat, a demented mother of a dentist, or a Presbyterian vice-president of a bank. © William Saroyan 1964

"Well, he finally mentioned marriage last night. He's against it."

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INNOCENT ONE

by Evan Hunter

IT was Pablo, poor bastard, who got it.
You must understand, first, that the sun was very hot on that day and Miguel had been working in it from just after dawn. He had eaten a hearty breakfast and then had taken to the fields early, remembering what had to be done and wanting to do it quickly.
There were many stones among the beans that day, and perhaps that is what started it all. When Miguel discovered the first stone, he reached down gingerly and tossed it over his shoulder to the rear of his neat row of beans. The sun was still not high in the sky, and the earth had not yet begun to bake, and so a smile worked its way over his brown features as he heard the stone thud to the soft earth behind him. He started hoeing again, thinking of Maria and the night before.
He would never regret having married her. Ah! but she was a one!
There was the beauty of the lark in her, and the passion of the tigress, and the energy of the . . .
He saw the second stone.
He shrugged. *Madre de Dios,* another one!

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He lifted it, threw it over his shoulder, and began hoeing again. He was surprised when he came across more stones. At first he thought someone had played a joke on him, and he pulled his black brows together, wondering who it could have been. Juan, that pig? Felipe, that animal with the slobbering lips? Pablo?

Then he remembered that it had rained the night before, and he realised that the waters had washed the soil clean, exposing the stones, bringing them to the surface.

He cursed himself for not having thought to protect the beans in some way. Then he cursed the stones. And since the sun was beginning to climb in the sky, he cursed that, too, and got to work.

The stones were not heavy. They were, in fact, rather small. It was that there were very many of them. He picked them up painstakingly, tossing them over his shoulders. How could a man hoe his beans when the rows were full of stones? He started to count them, stopping at ten because that was as far as he knew how to count, and then starting with one all over again.

The sun was very hot now. The hoe lay on the ground, the rich earth staining its long handle. He kept picking up the stones, not looking up now, swearing softly; the sweat pouring down his neck and back. A long shadow fell over the land before him; then a voice joined the shadow, and Miguel straightened his back and rubbed his earth-stained fingers on his white trousers.

"You are busy, Miguel?" the voice asked. The voice came through the speaker's thick lips. It bubbled like the voice of the kettle. It was Felipe.

"No, I am not busy," Miguel said. "I was, at this very moment, lying on my back and counting the stars in the sky."

"But it is only morn—" Felipe started. Miguel's subtle humour struck him then, and he slapped his thigh and commenced to guffaw like the jackass he was. "Counting the stars!" he bellowed. "Counting the stars!"

Miguel was not amused. "You were perhaps on your way somewhere, *amigo*. If so, do not let me detain you."

"I was going nowhere, Miguel," Felipe said.

Miguel grunted and began picking up stones again. He forgot how many tens he had counted thus far, so he started all over again.

"You are picking up stones, Miguel?"

Miguel did not answer.

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"I say you are picking up—"

"Yes!" Miguel said. "Yes, I am picking stones." He stood upright and kneaded the small of his back.

Felipe grinned knowingly. "The back, it hurts, eh?"

"Yes," Miguel said. He looked at Felipe. "Why do you nod?"

"Me? Nod? Who, me?"

"Yes, you. Why do you stand there and nod your head like the wise snake who has swallowed the young chicken?"

Felipe grinned and nodded his head. "You must be mistaken, Miguel. I do not nod."

"I am not blind, *amigo*," Miguel said testily. "I say my back hurts, and you begin to nod your head. Why? Is it funny that my back hurts? Is it funny that there are stones among my beans?"

"No, Miguel. It is not funny."

"Then why do you nod?"

Felipe grinned. "Maria, eh?"

Miguel clenched his fists. "What about Maria—my wife?"

Felipe opened his eyes innocently. "Nothing, Miguel, nothing. Just..." He shrugged. "Maria."

"You refer to my back?"

"*Si.*"

"And you connect this somehow with Maria?"

"*Si.*"

"How?"

"This Maria—your wife, God bless her—she is a strong one, eh, Miguel?"

Miguel was beginning to get a little angry. He was not used to discussing his wife among the beans. "So? What do you mean she is a... a strong one?"

"You know. Much passion. Like the tigress."

"How do you know this?"

Felipe grinned. "I do not know it, Miguel."

Miguel's lips tightened into a narrow line. "Then if you do *not* know it, how is it that you know it?"

"I must go to town, Miguel," Felipe said hastily. "I will see you soon."

"Just a moment, Felipe. How is it—?"

"Goodbye, *amigo*."

Felipe turned away, and Miguel stared at him as he walked towards the road. The dust rose about him, and he waved at Miguel. Miguel did not return the wave. He stood there with the sun on his head and the many stones at his feet...

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How did this animal with the slobbering lips know of Maria's passion? Surely he had never spoken a word about it to any of the men. Then how did Felipe know?

The possibilities annoyed Miguel. He turned again to the stones, and this time they seemed heavier, and the sun seemed stronger, and his back seemed to ache more.

How did Felipe know?

He was pondering this in an ill temper when Juan came to stand beside him. Juan was darkly handsome, his white trousers and shirt bright in the powerful sunlight. Miguel looked up at him sourly and said, "So? Do you wish to pass the time with idle chatter also?"

Juan smiled, his teeth even and white against the ruddy brown of his face. "Did I offend you, Miguel?"

"No!" Miguel snapped.

"Then why do you leap at me like a tiger?"

"Do not mention this animal to me," Miguel said.

"No?"

"No! I have stones to clear, and I want to clear them before lunch because Maria will be calling me then."

"*Ahhh*," Juan said grinning.

Miguel stared at him for a moment. The grin was the same one Felipe had worn, except that Felipe was ugly and with slobbering lips—and Juan was perhaps the handsomest man in the village.

Miguel stared at him and wondered if it had been *he* who had told Felipe of Maria's great passion. And if so, how had Juan known?

"Why do you '*ahhhhh*'?" he asked.

"Did I '*ahhhhh*'?"

"You did. You did indeed. You made this very sound. Why?"

"I was not aware, *amigo*." Juan smiled again.

"Was it mention of lunch that evoked this sigh?"

"No. No, I do not think so."

"Then there remains only Maria."

Juan grinned and said nothing.

"I said—"

"I heard you, Miguel."

"What about Maria?"

Juan shrugged. "Who said anything about Maria?"

"You are saying it with your eyes," Miguel said heatedly. "What about her?"

"She is your wife, Miguel."

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"I know she is my wife."

Juan was grinning again.

"What is so funny about that, Juan? Why do you grin now?"

"I have nothing to say, *amigo*. Maria is your wife. God bless her."

"What does that mean?"

"It means . . . well, God bless her. She is a remarkable woman."

"How would you know?" Miguel shouted.

"That she is a remarkable woman? Why, Miguel . . ."

"You know what I mean! What is going on? Why do you all discuss my wife so intimately? What—?"

"Intimately?"

"Yes! Juan, if there is something . . ."

Juan smiled again. "But there is nothing, Miguel. Nothing."

"You are sure?"

"I must go to town now, my friend. Is there anything I can do for you there?"

"No!" Miguel snapped.

"Then, *adios, amigo*."

He turned and walked off, shaking his head, and Miguel could have sworn he heard him mutter the word tigress.

He went to work on the stones with a fury. What was all this? Why Felipe? And now Juan?

What was going on with his wife?

He thought of her passion, her gleaming black hair, the way it trailed down the curve of her back, reaching her waist. He thought of the fluid muscles on that back beneath the soft, firm skin. He thought of the long, graceful sweep of her legs, the way the firelight played on her lifted breasts.

Too passionate, he thought.

Far too passionate for simple Miguel who worked in the fields picking stones and hoeing beans. Perhaps she was a woman who needed more than one man, yes, who needed many men, yes, who needed many, many, many men.

Was that why Felipe had laughed with his dripping lips? Was that why Juan had smiled that superior, handsome smile? Miguel picked up his hoe and swung it at a large rock. The rock chipped, but it did not budge from the earth.

Was that it? Was Maria making a cuckold of her simple Miguel? Was that why all the men in the village were sniggering, smiling, laughing behind their hands? Or was it only the

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men from this village? Was it the adjoining village as well? Or did it go beyond that? To the next town? To the nearest city? To all Mexico?

Did they pass her from hand to hand like a used wine jug? Did they all drink of her, and was that why they laughed at Miguel now? Was that why they laughed behind their hands, laughed aloud with their mouths and their eyes?

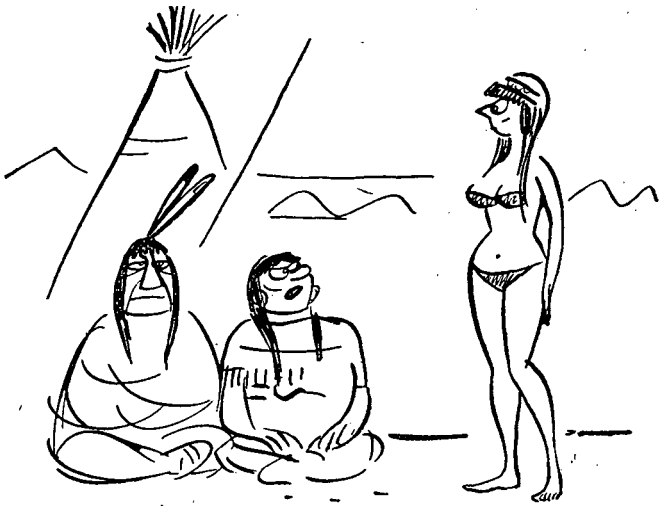
The sun was hot, and the bowels of the earth stank, and the rock would not be budged from the ground. Miguel chopped at it with the hoe, using the sharp blade like an axe.

I will show them, he thought. I will teach them to laugh! I will teach them to put the horns on Miguel de la Piaz!

It was then that Pablo strolled by. He had passed Miguel's house, and Maria had asked him to call her husband home for lunch. He was not a bright person, Pablo. He walked up close to Miguel, who furiously pounded the earth with his hoe, using it like an axe, the sharp blade striking sparks from the rock. He tapped Miguel on the shoulder, smiled, and started to say, "Maria . . ."

Miguel whirled like an animal, the hoe raised high.

So you see, it was Pablo, poor bastard, who got it.



"It's just that your father and I feel the whole effect is un-Indian, that's all."

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MEDICI EAR-RING

A new story with a subtle twist

by Winston Graham

BOB LOVERIDGE owned this Medici ear-ring. It had been in his family for a long time, and it was one of the things he'd always bring out to show you if you gave him any encouragement. He was proud of it, liked telling the story.

Bob was a friend of mine, though he was twenty years older, and for a few months I'd courted his daughter. He was in shipping and lived in Hampstead and drove a Jaguar Mark 10—Lucille, his daughter, had the usual Mini. Bob's marriage had folded up about twelve years ago, and Lucille was now the only woman in his life.

I am an artist. That means I eke out life in the conventional corduroys and turtle neck sweater, and earn as much in a year, if I'm lucky, as a junior typist. This made the prospect of suggesting marriage to Lucille rather difficult. I had known the family all my life, and I got on well with Bob; and no doubt he had enough for three, but one doesn't want to be kept—nor, if painting really means something, does one want to drift into shipping as a means of keeping a family. Because coy little water-colours of a Saturday just won't do.

It was hard, as I say, because she was a pretty girl and we got on well—really well; she had the colouring I like—autumn-tinted hair and short-sighted sleepy eyes with umber depths to them. So when she took up with Peter Stevenson I was half jealous, half relieved. An artist can afford girls, and there are always girls in Chelsea who will share your bed and your gas stove; but marriage . . .

Peter's arrival took temptation out of my way, but made what I was losing all the more delectable. I liked him too—

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perhaps all the better because he was poor. But as a junior teacher even his prospects, at twenty-three, were better than mine at thirty.

At this time I'm talking about, they had been engaged for three months, and Bob Loveridge rang me, inviting me to his house for the evening.

Just then I'd rented a studio from an equally unsuccessful friend who was trying his luck for a change in Paris, and I was painting hard, having had luck with two things I'd sold to the Grantham Gallery and was feeling generally inspired. I dragged myself away from the easel rather reluctantly, and put on my best suit and went along to the Loveridges' expecting a good meal and probably an evening of bridge with Lucille and her father and Peter Stevenson. Bob was mad on bridge, and I like it for its orderliness, its formality. But when I got there, I was told there was to be an eight. The Mayhews and the Frenches were coming, and we were to play duplicate, which is always a bit more intense.

The Mayhews turned out to be an upper middle-aged, upper middle-income couple from out of town somewhere; she a Jewess, and he a tight-necked, red-faced man with a Battle of Britain scar on his cheek. The Frenches were late and when they came it was only Captain French, his sister having gone down with a migraine.

I disliked French at sight. Perhaps he couldn't be blamed for his defaulting sister mucking up the evening; but he was in a crack regiment, not long out of Sandhurst, and young and suave and far too sure of his own charm. He hardly bothered to apologise for being late, or for not letting Bob know in time to get an eighth. The fact that he had come himself was apparently in his view a more than adequate recompense.

And straightaway he set his sights on Lucille and took a bearing. He talked so much to her at dinner that she might have been the General's daughter. Now Lucille is nobody's fool, and no doubt it had happened to her before; but I suppose his charm really did work for some people, and she was modest enough to be flattered. I could see rocks ahead. Peter Stevenson stood the onslaught on his girl pretty well. He was on his best behaviour, of course, but I had known times when he could be quick off the mark and bull-headed. Humphrey French—and in a way Lucille—were trying him high tonight.

After dinner we drifted into the drawing room, and the two tables were set for bridge; all I could see—for three

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of us, anyhow—was "dummy" bridge, which is neither fish, flesh nor fowl, and I was beginning to yawn mentally when Captain French suggested we play poker instead. What business it was of his to suggest this I never knew, but anyway Bob said, why not—and if everyone was agreeable, we could make the stakes fairly small.

This we did, pulling the two tables together and settling down, French again beside Lucille; and Peter took the opposite side of the table. By now his face was tightening, like somebody's glove that's a size too small.

A humorist once called poker a game of chance. Maybe he was a good player. I am not. Nor is Peter. Or he wasn't that night...

It became a sort of private war between him and French, and that made him reckless. French, of course, was cool as an ice-pack and knew his stuff—from long years of practice, no

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doubt. Anyway, he won all along the line. As for the others, the Mayhews lost a little, but in the good-humoured way of people having an inexpensive evening out. Bob was just in pocket. Lucille was very lucky and won quite a lot. This made things more difficult for Peter. By eleven, I was twelve pounds down, Peter about thirty.

At this stage, Peter said with deadly politeness that he was cleaned out, and the game, in spite of Humphrey French's offer to lend him a fiver, broke up. Well, I was livid both with French and with Bob, because Bob must have known, if he'd the gumption of a louse, that neither of us could afford to lose that kind of money. In spite of my little run of prosperity, twelve pounds to me was more than a hundred to him, and I could see it might mean me being late with the rent for the studio—an idea I wasn't wild about, seeing there was someone in Paris depending on it for his bread ticket. And thirty pounds to Peter at this stage must have been quite a fortune.

By this time a bit of the general embarrassment must have penetrated Bob's thick skin, and there's no doubt he would later have tried some tactful and roundabout way of making it up to the boy—if it had ever got that far. So would Lucille; but for her it was already a little late. By now Peter's general dislike of the situation was centring not so much on Humphrey French as on her.

It wasn't unnatural. Anyone who's been in love knows that love is about as stable as the bubble in a spirit level. Give it the slightest tilt and you're way off centre and inclining at forty-five degrees towards the milder forms of homicide.

So the fraternisation between Peter and Lucille after the poker game was strictly nil. Humphrey French was still making a fuss of the girl, but she'd seen the red lights, and did some back-pedalling.

Then I heard Mrs. Mayhew ask about the Medici Ear-Ring. Bob had mentioned it to her at dinner, and this started a new trend of talk. He went across to his little safe in the wall and brought back the ear-ring for us to see.

Of course I'd seen it three or four times before, and had watched the usual reactions, the exclamations of interest and admiration. I reckon Bob must have had more than his full payment in entertainment, even if he had bought the thing and paid double its value in some casual sale; but in fact he swore it had been in his family for a hundred and fifty years.

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"My great-great-grandfather bought it in Naples from a broken-down nobleman. My great-grandfather in a letter to his brother refers to a parchment that went with the ear-ring, telling how it came to be made and giving a record of its owners, but, whatever it was, it's been lost. All we have is this letter which presumably tells the same story, the way one would write to one's brother about it. The date of the ear-ring is 1494."

"Very exact," said Mayhew, finishing his whisky. "Would it be spring or autumn?"

"Well, the exactness is not so silly as it sounds—that's if the story is true. In fact it would be the autumn." Bob really enjoyed being able to say this. "A pair of ear-rings was made by a Florentine silversmith for one of the Medicis, Pietro the Second. Lorenzo—the great Lorenzo—had been dead only two years and his son Pietro was twenty-three—a brilliant young man but unstable and dissolute. These ear-rings were made to his order for his current favourite, a girl called Giovanna Farenza.

"The story is that when they were ready, Pietro insisted he should fit them in her ears himself. But while he was in her room doing this—and who knows what else besides—news came that the French, under Charles VIII, were in Italy and advancing on Pisa and Leghorn with 40,000 trained soldiers. Florence was committed by treaty to oppose this invasion, so Pietro up and left Giovanna Farenza on the instant, with one ear-ring in her ear and the other still in his pocket.

"They never met again. Pietro was outnumbered and turned yellow. He gave in to his enemies and made a shameful bargain with them. When he returned to Florence he was thrown out for his treachery, and the long Medici rule was at an end. Pietro, after a few attempts to regain power, went south with the French and a few years later was drowned in a river-crossing and buried at Monte Cassino... This ear-ring, this is the other one—the one that is supposed to have belonged to Giovanna Farenza..."

It was a pretty trinket, heavy for the modern eye, of chased silver with a pearl inset. It was a pretty story too. Even if the thing had been dreamed up in some silversmith's shop in Naples, it was still picturesque. One felt it ought to be true.

"I should think this is worth quite a lot," said Humphrey French. "The pearl alone."

"I've never had it valued. To me it's just an heirloom that I wouldn't want to be without," Bob said.

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Captain French asked, "What do you think, Nora? You ought to have a pretty good idea."

It was the first hint I'd got that he and Mrs. Mayhew had met before. Nora Mayhew coloured and picked up the ear-ring again.

"Why you?" said Bob.

"I've studied antiques," said Mrs. Mayhew. "I used to have a shop in Marylebone Lane. This . . . oh, I'd think it was worth . . ." She felt the pearl between her fingers. "Dreadfully difficult to know nowadays, but if the pearl's what it seems, I should say that is worth three hundred pounds. The whole thing—as an antique—I think if you put it up at Sotheby's you'd be very unlucky to get less than five hundred pounds—even without the story."

Bob whistled. "Well, well . . . though I should never sell it. It's got a sentimental feeling for me—as if Giovanna Farenza were an ancestor of mine."

"Perhaps she was," said Mayhew, chuckling into his tight collar.

"The other one has never been found, I suppose?" said French. "Isn't it worth making a duplicate? You'd look wonderful in them," he added to Lucille.

"I've never had my ears pierced. Anyway, I'm not the Italian type. One needs to be tall, with sleek black hair."

Bob was called away to the telephone and talk broke out generally. When he came back he gave us whiskies all round and under this warming influence things improved.

About twelve o'clock, the Mayhews said they ought to be going; it was a long drive, and Mayhew was flying to Paris in the morning. They got up, and the others got up; then Bob said, "Oh, I'll put the ear-ring away," and picked up the case and carried it to the safe. At the safe he stopped with his back to us, while Humphrey French told us about a marvellous yachting party he had been on last year. After a minute Bob turned and said, "By the way, what did I *do* with the ear-ring?"

We all stared at him.

"What do you think you did with it?" Mayhew asked.

"Put it back in the case."

"Yes, well . . ."

"It isn't here," said Bob. "I just happened to open it as I was going to lock it away and . . ."

We all stared at the case which he held for us to see. It was lined with shiny blue silk and quite empty.

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"It's only by chance that I opened it," he repeated. "I was just going to put the case back in the safe and I clicked it open with my thumb . . ."

"You dropped it in your pocket, probably," Lucille said.

"No." He felt in his pockets. "I never put it in a pocket because it's a bit delicate. Anyway, don't you remember, I was called away to the phone and left it in here."

Nora Mayhew gave a brief laugh and said, "My dear, let's turn out *our* pockets, then. Perhaps somebody has been absent-minded and mistaken it for a two-shilling piece!"

At once Bob was apologetic. Of course, nothing was further from his thoughts than that anyone here should have pocketed it. In fact, he thought perhaps someone might be joking. Obviously, nothing could be further from his thoughts . . .

We searched. We searched the room, we turned out the loose cushions from the chairs, we lifted the rugs, we moved the tables, we searched the study, where the telephone was, we even shook out magazines and newspapers in that rather senseless way one does when all the sensible places have been explored. Nothing. We stood there dusting our knees, not quite sure what the next move was.

Eventually Bob said, "D'you know I believe it *is* a joke. One of you is doing this to take the mickey out of me." He smiled. "Honestly . . . it's the only explanation."

There was an uncomfortable silence.

"Has anyone else been in the study?" I asked. "The maid who served the coffee . . ."

"No, that was before I took out the ear-ring. And even if I had carried it in there, there's no way into the room except through this one. Violet only came in here to pick up the coffee things. She never went into the study at all."

"You should come on one of these yachting parties sometime," Humphrey French said to Lucille in an undertone. "Fabulous fun. Just people of our own age, you know. Quite a ball."

Nora Mayhew picked up her bag. "We've really got to go, Bob. I'm sorry, but it's a full hour's drive. I don't know what you think about this—this loss, I really don't. It's terribly unfortunate to happen like this—"

"I'm stumped. Completely and utterly—"

"But I think I know what I *want* to do," Mrs. Mayhew continued. "Or what I *ought* to do, anyhow. What we all

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ought to do." She laughed in embarrassment and went to the card table and cleared a space. Then she turned her handbag upside-down and the contents fell out with a clatter—lipsticks, compact, hair grips, cigarettes, lighter, money, comb, aspirin, nail boards, eye shadow, safety pins.

"My *dear* girl—"

"It's the only thing, Bob. Really the only thing. Unless you want to call in the police—"

"Of course not . . . At least, not in that way, and not yet—"

"Well, calling them in later won't be much use if one of us is to blame. Really, this is the only sensible thing to do—for our satisfaction, apart from yours. Darling, how *would* we feel if the ear-ring were never found?"

"It's on the floor somewhere," said our host in exasperation. "It's been dropped, or slipped down somewhere—"

"Well, you do see we can't stay all night, and this is the only other way. The men can turn out their pockets too. Lucille, come and look through these things for me, will you? George, there's another table over there. Empty your pockets and let everyone see you do it."

With Bob still muttering and protesting, Nora Mayhew insisted that her husband should turn out everything in his pockets, and when Bob refused to search him, Mayhew took off his coat, pulled it inside out and offered himself to be searched by French.

So after about five very awkward minutes, the two Mayhews had made it pretty plain to everyone in the room that, unless they were a couple of professional pickpockets, *they* were not responsible for any funny goings-on in Hampstead. They then prepared to take their leave, with over-assurances of undying friendship on both sides. In fact it was quite hard to tell who were the more embarrassed, the Loveridges or their out-of-town friends.

When Bob came back into the room again, French was talking earnestly and without apparent constraint to Lucille and to me, and Peter was sitting on the settee idly flipping the pages of a magazine.

Bob blew out a breath, "Phew! That was a difficult moment. God, I'm tired! Shall we call it a day?"

"The difficult moment hasn't entirely passed," said Peter, staring at his magazine. "What's going to happen to the rest of us?"

"Well, the obvious," said French, yawning. "I've got nothing to hide. Let's get it over and done with."

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"I've told you," Bob said, "this is *unnecessary*. The darned thing wasn't insured, but if it's gone, it's gone. I don't want to lose all my friends as a consequence."

"You won't lose 'em if you let them clear themselves," French said. "Nora Mayhew was right. We'll be much happier to turn out our pockets and have it all above board."

"Speak for yourself," said Peter.

We all looked at him in surprise.

"What d'you mean?"

"I think Bob's right about this," Peter said. "He invited us here as his friends. Something has vanished. Disappeared down a hole, maybe. That's bad luck for everybody. But if we have to turn out our pockets just to prove that we haven't stolen the thing, then for heaven's sake..."

"Exactly—" Bob said.

"Not exactly at all," French said. "Nora Mayhew was right. It's plain common sense—"

"Stop sheltering behind Nora Mayhew," Peter snapped. "If it's your opinion, say so."

French was still as cool as he'd been at poker. "All right, it's my opinion, then. If I go now, without any check, and the ear-ring's never found, then I could never come here again. Bob may be a trustful chap, but he can't help his thoughts."

Peter Stevenson looked at me, but much as I disliked French, I really had to agree with him over this. If you got a clearance now, well then, you were in the clear. Of course, they were both right in a sense. How can you choose between trust and proof?

Peter put down the magazine. "It so happens that I don't want to turn out my pockets. Right? The reason's unimportant. I just don't. You've known me for about nine months, Bob. You, Lucille, for about twelve. Well, I give you my word that I've never touched your ear-ring tonight. Will that be enough? Satisfactory? Or is it not enough?"

"Of course—"

"Of course," Bob said slowly. "I don't want to—"

"Well, thanks," said French. "But I suppose you realise that it leaves us in a position of thinking anything we choose."

He turned to the card table, which by now had been cleared of everything else, and methodically emptied all his pockets. Having done that, he pulled his jacket inside out the way Mayhew had done and then went towards Bob in his shirt sleeves with his hands in the air.

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Bob said, "No, no," so French then turned to me, and to satisfy him I patted his trousers and under his arms. Then, because I certainly didn't want to be saddled with any of the blame, I did the same. Goodness knows, there wasn't much in my pockets but an empty wallet, a handkerchief and a bunch of keys.

When it was done and we had our coats on again French looked at Peter. I thought Peter was being an obstinate fool too and said, much to my later regret, "Come on, it's nothing; get it over. Bob doesn't want it, but we ought to insist on it as a matter of common good manners. Then the whole thing can be dropped. Like the ear-ring. I think the bloody thing's still stuck in the springs of one of the armchairs."

Peter looked at me, and the way he looked gave me the first qualm. Until then I had only been anxious to clear him of any suspicion.

He abruptly jerked round and looked at Lucille, then he turned to Bob.

"Well, if you will have it you will have it! The reason I didn't want to empty my pockets is that—that I have an ear-ring I brought to show you that's just like the one that's disappeared."

We looked back at him, feeling pretty stupid ourselves, while he put his hand in his pocket and fumbled about and then took out a matchbox. He put it down on the card table with a bang and opened the box, took out an ear-ring and slapped it on the table beside the box.

"I've only just got hold of it," he said angrily. "It's been in my family apparently for a time, but I hadn't seen it before. I wondered if it was a match for the one you have so I brought it along to show you and compare it. But as it happened I decided not to take it out when you showed us yours."

Bob was looking hard at Peter while he spoke. We all were some distance from the table. Nobody made a move.

Peter said irritably, "For God's sake, look at it. There it is. That's the one I brought. It isn't yours, Bob, but I think it makes a pair."

Bob walked slowly to the table and picked up—well, picked up—*the* ear-ring. He held it for us all to see, turned it round, smoothed a thumb and finger over the pearl. His face was quite white, like someone who'd had bad news. Then he suddenly offered it to his daughter. Lucille's autumn-coloured hair shook in a violent negative.

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Humphrey French moved across and stared at the ear-ring but didn't touch it. Then he shrugged and looked expressively at Peter. I did not move.

Peter said again, "I think it makes a pair. That's if we ever find the other one."

Bob said slowly, "I suppose you—meant it as a joke."

"Daddy," Lucille said, "if we—"

"A joke?" said Peter. "No, it was no joke."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said Bob. "I was only trying to find a—a reasonable excuse for you for trying on—such a—such a damned silly *trick*."

"Silly trick!" Peter said between his teeth. "That's my ear-ring!"

"Can you prove it?"

"Why the hell should I?"

"I'd like to hear you try."

"Well, you're going to be disappointed. It's exactly what I said before—either you trust and believe in someone or you don't—"

"I'm sorry, Peter," Bob said. "We've got a little beyond that, I'm afraid. I don't like what's happened and I'm not going to pretend to."

"I'm sorry, too," said Peter, staring directly back at him.

Bob said, "Can you find your own way out?"

Peter glanced around—at me, at Captain French, briefly at Lucille.

"Right," he said. "*Right*. I'll go. Goodnight and be damned to the lot of you!"

And he went. As he moved I spoke his name, having some unformed impulse to try to save the complete break. But whatever I had said at that moment would have been useless. Maybe the only one who could have stopped him was Lucille, and she was as tongue-tied as any of us.

The front door slammed.

The following day I had a visitor. The place I'd rented from my friend was the top floor of a Victorian house in Fulham-pretending-to-be-Chelsea. It wasn't huge even by the standards of the 'sixties—a poky bedroom with a shared bath; but the studio was big and had a north light, and one cooked one's meals on a gas-ring in the corner.

It was Lucille Loveridge, whom I might have expected but somehow hadn't. I'd never really got to the heart-missing-a-beat stage with her; but welcoming her there, stained shirt

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and brush in hand, I thought how exactly right she was for me, the shape, the colour, the smell, the grace of good moving and a personality that immediately went click-click with mine. She lit the whole place up.

We talked for a bit generally, and she drew her cheeks in over a nervous cigarette while she looked at some of my recent pictures. I'd been going through a Fauvism phase and was just coming out for air at the other side. I tried to explain this to her and she nodded and was dutifully intelligent, but I knew only about a third of it registered either way.

Eventually, when she'd corkscrewed the stub of her cigarette in a British Railway's ashtray, she said, "Well, Bill, wasn't that a mess last night!"

I tutted in sympathetic agreement. She said, "I felt so *sick*. I could have been as sick as a dog. I got to sleep about five, but then only for a couple of hours."

I said, "You haven't heard anything from Peter?"

She shook her head. "Nor will I, if I know him. It's the end between us. And all because of a filthy little ear-ring that couldn't have mattered less!"

I looked at her cautiously. "In a way, it *had* to matter. Because it worked out as a question of trust, didn't it?"

"But why should he take the ear-ring in the first place? He's not a thief—never could be. The money he lost was an awful lot, I know, but it wasn't that important. Good heavens, I would have advanced it him out of my quarterly allowance if he had wanted it!"

"He didn't want it," I said. "He wanted trust, didn't he? And he didn't get it."

"Should he have? With the thing in his pocket? Should we all have said absolutely nothing and let him take the ear-ring away? It's just past my apprehension, why he should ever have done it!"

"You don't think there was any truth in his story?"

She blinked at me with her cloudy eyes and lit another cigarette. "No. How could there be? It was such a feeble excuse. Nobody's born as young as that, Bill; not any more."

I liked her every way. Even in her wooden-headed approach to this problem of Peter, which was so much like her father. I liked the look of her brassière strap showing through the shoulder of her thin blouse. I liked her ankles and legs. I coveted them. I coveted her. I knew I could teach her so much about life, without harming or altering the essential

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obstinate, but charming, female who answered to the name of Lucille Loveridge.

And at that moment I was very much tempted, because I knew just how she felt... how easily that spirit-level bubble of love could be given a tilt in my direction. "Look, my sweet," I'd say, and put my arm round her, "forget it for a day or so. Have lunch with me and then come back here and we can make plans for the evening. I'm free as air, and the only way to face life when it kicks you in the face is to grin and kick back. Can't I help you to kick back?"

Something like that but a little less obvious. Maybe words wouldn't be necessary at all, once one had made the right gestures...

She was looking at me. Well, I was tempted like hell. But what's always been wrong with me in my life is that I'm not a big-timer.

I said, "Should I go and see Peter?"

No great smoker at normal times, she drew at this second cigarette as if she had a real grudge against it. "It wouldn't do any good, would it? I mean, what good would it do? What could you say? What could he say?"

"I don't know. That's what we'd have to find out."

"You don't think there's anything in his fantastic story, do you?"

"Seems very doubtful. But if we both agree that he's not the natural thieving type, I think we ought to try to find what the true explanation is."

"Yes," she said. "Yes. If we only had *something* to go on."

When Peter Stevenson came out of the school gates at Beckenham I fell into step beside him. He looked startled, and then hitched up his collar and walked on.

"I want a word with you," I said casually.

"Go to hell!"

It wasn't good advice considering how I'd felt a few hours ago, but I put it down to ignorance.

"Was that story you told last night the truth?"

"What does it matter!"

"I thought it did."

It was beginning to rain. He turned into the carpark.

"You must admit," I said, "that it was a pretty odd coincidence."

We came up to his dingy Morris 1000 and he began to

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fumble in his pockets. "Of course it was a coincidence," he said. "I'd never seen the damned thing until Tuesday."

"Which? Yours or theirs?"

"So you do believe me?"

"Yes," I said. "You're a bit thick at times, Peter, but you're not a liar. You haven't got the right lobes to your ears."

He didn't think much of my humour and bent to unlock the door of the car. "Can I give you a lift somewhere?"

"Yes, the nearest Tube station. I only came out to see you."

He clicked my door and presently I got in. He put the key in the ignition but did not switch on. "An old aunt of mine died," he said. "Last week. I was the only relative. I went down to the funeral and then again on Tuesday to look over some things. There's some good Meissen that will make a show in the sale rooms. No money except what was in a tin box under the bed. That was what I lost. Odd how these old ladies exist on a shoestring, with an old age pension and no capital, but with about a thousand pounds worth of china in daily use. Her jewel box was full of trinkets but nothing valuable except this ear-ring. As soon as I saw it I thought, good lord, that's exactly like the Loveridges', and took it to show them and compare it. I knew Bob would be sure to bring his ear-ring out if there were strangers there, and I thought it would set him rocking on his heels if I matched it. As good as a straight flush at poker. The one I didn't quite get." He brooded, staring at the windscreen.

"Then when it came to the time," I said, "when Bob took out his ear-ring you were feeling too bloody-minded to produce yours."

He looked at me. "How did you know?"

"The crystal ball never lets me down."

"I suppose it was obvious, wasn't it?" He added quickly, "It wasn't so much losing the money I minded."

"Of course not. It was the man French making a pass at Lucille."

"Yes . . . yes." Peter switched on the engine and started the car. He backed carefully out of the carpark and headed north. "I have to go some way tonight, so I might as well take you farther into town."

"Thanks."

"D'you know," he said after a minute or two, when the traffic had eased off, "I've always thought *you* were my nearest rival for Lucille."

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"Good lord. What gave you that idea?"

"Well, I don't know . . . Isn't it true?"

"I know when I'm out of the running," I said. "Lucille fell for you in a big way at the first meeting, and I've never been in the hunt since."

He laughed shortly. "But she still thinks I'm a liar and a thief, eh?"

"She doesn't *want* to, my dear man. She's still madly in love with you, but if you go stalking off in a tizzy without making any attempt to justify yourself, what on earth can she think? In fact you seemed almost to welcome the thing as a trial by faith."

He stopped with a jerk at traffic lights, and the man behind gave a complaining toot. "D'you think it's *my* fault, then? Good grief, if you're in love with someone you don't believe them cheats and pickpockets at the drop of a hat! What chance is there of making a go of marriage if that's the only way you can begin—"

"Oh, I know, I know. But this is a tough age. I understand exactly how you feel but that doesn't mean I approve of your sitting back with the sulks and doing nothing to prove your point. Try to think how impossible your story looks from their point of view. Haven't you got some evidence of ownership of this ear-ring? Didn't your aunt have some record of it? When did she buy it and where? Have you been through all her things?"

"No, of course not. It's not a job I like, prying into some dead old lady's private life. I never knew her well, Aunt Maud. She was one of those stiff-backed old girls who never let themselves down. But there's a mountain of stuff . . ."

"I know what it's like. But have a shot. You don't want to lose a valuable trinket and a valuable woman as well."

As we accelerated away I saw his face had gone clouded and obstinate again. "They're doubting the trinket; I'm doubting—well . . . I was ordered out of their house like a common sneak-thief. Isn't it up to them to do the next bit of thinking?"

I sighed. "It seems to me nobody thinks in this. Except perhaps, me. But I can't bring you together. I can't get you near enough even to bang your heads."

He let me out at the next Tube station.

I saw nothing of any of them for a couple of weeks. I was working hard, and I was putting on the canvas something I wanted to put there. It was exciting and absorbing—one

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of the fairly rare moments in an artist's life when there is a fusion between ambition and attainment. Rare, but it makes the rest worth while.

Then, just after the impulse had worked itself out, I got a card from Bob Loveridge asking me to go up and see him without delay. When I got there, boy, he was in a fine state. A letter had come by the morning post. In it was a typewritten message, unheaded and unsigned. It read:

> *It was not the thief's intention that someone else should be accused of the theft. Enclosed is a pawn-ticket. By taking this to the address given, your ear-ring may, on payment of twenty-five pounds, be redeemed. In future, when people offer to turn out their pockets, ask them also to take off their shoes.*

I went with Bob Loveridge to this shop in Dulwich, and there the ear-ring certainly was, and Bob coughed up twenty-five quid, much to the disappointment of the pawnbroker, a cockney with a fat tight little face that cracked every now and then into a smile that looked as if it was painful. The young man who pawned it, he said, was about seventeen or eighteen and was dressed like a messenger. He would never conceivably recognise him again. The anxiety went out of his smile when we stopped asking questions, but the disappointment remained.

The ear-ring was a bit bent, but otherwise sound enough. The odd thing was that when we got it home and compared it with Peter's ear-ring they were not an exact match, there being slight differences in the turning of the silver. Whether it was in fact the ear-ring that Pietro the Second carried off to war, or whether it was another one made by the same bright Neapolitan silversmith to sell the same story over again, we never knew. The pearl was a good one and the silver was old. Lucille wore them both at her wedding.

Not that she came to that easily. Having let myself in for the dreary job of go-between I carried on, but before the end I began to feel like a UN conciliation officer.

Of course Bob combined the handsome apologies he made to Peter with an absolute burning determination to smoke out the real thief. The fact that he'd been led to make such a bloomer was an extra goad.

From time to time he could be seen staring broodingly at Violet's bent back when she came into the room. Nora

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Mayhew seemed the least unlikely suspect since it was she who had made the most fuss and insisted on a superficial search being made.

We knew that she had been in antiques, and Bob had dug out the fact that she had once been heavily fined in Italy for attempting to smuggle an Old Master out of the country without a permit. Captain French's association with her was cleared up when we found that Mrs. Mayhew, who had been a Miss Cohen, was at school in Switzerland with Humphrey French's mother, who had been a Miss Blomberg, and that they frequently still skied together. This sinister revelation did not help us at all. Nor particularly did the discovery that Humphrey French was heavily in debt—it seemed likely enough in a young soldier who could still afford to cling to old-fashioned habits.

Eventually we gave it up, but the problem still rankled. One of Bob's favourite questions was why the person who sent it to the pawnbroker had not asked much more than twenty-five pounds for it, since, if it was someone in the room, or even Violet the maid, they must all have heard Nora Mayhew's estimate of its value. It didn't appear to occur to him that perhaps the thief urgently wanted some fairly small sum of money for a limited period and might have pawned the jewel, intending later to redeem it and to return it in any event.

I've often wondered how Bob would take such a suggestion.

Anyway my friend in Paris hadn't to wait for the rent of the studio.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

(JUNE ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Four-poster.* 8, *Natal.* 9, *Now or never.* 10, *Hardy.* 11, *Surfs.* 12, *Masterpiece.* 18, *A Christmas Carol.* 19, *Air Ministry.* 25, *Erase.* 26, *Jenny.* 27, *Red Admiral.* 28, *Deeds.* 28, *Wellington.*

Down. 1, *Finish.* 2, *Upward.* 3, *Purism.* 4, *Spears.* 5, *Emerge.* 6, *Samaritan.* 7, *Bandicoot.* 13, *Arson.* 14, *Times.* 15, *Riser.* 16, *Scrivener.* 17, *Promenade.* 20, *Inhere.* 21, *Thrall.* 22, *Yeoman.* 23, *Garret.* 24, *Berlin.*

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The

THE terrace by the swimming-pool at the Hotel Grand-Casino had a certain distinction. Each table was of a different colour, with chairs to match.

Not only did this give a striking effect—the blue, red, yellow, green table, each with its cluster of chairs around it, standing out in sharp contrast to the white of the flagstones. Also it was helpful in avoiding confusion when making a rendezvous —"See you at the pink table for drinks at six."

Paul Stafford was sitting alone at the blue table. It was a little early for the cocktail hour and the only others on the terrace were a noisy group—German tourists?—at the yellow table. Hotel guests were drifting up from the beach, pausing from time to time for lagging youngsters who could not see the point in leaving the beach with the late afternoon sun still shining. The pool was empty of swimmers, gone into the hotel to change for dinner, except for one fat man proud of his ability to float, lying on the water with his paunch half submerged, as though giving an imitation of a submarine recharging its batteries.

Stafford sipped the Pernod that had been brought to him. It was something he did not normally drink. But when in France . . .

A woman appeared at the top of the steps leading from the hotel. She paused there a moment, then descended to the terrace and strolled over to the green table.

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The magic of France, brilliant sun and sea— and a chance meeting with a beautiful girl who cannot discuss her past

Blue Table

by WILLIAM SCOTT

Stafford was still looking at her when she had given her order to one of the waiters and was now taking cigarette case and lighter from her bag.

She was beautiful. An arresting sort of beauty that made Stafford quite unashamed of having watched her progress from the hotel. She looked so fresh and cool and clean. She was wearing a light brown linen dress. Her hair was brown. Her skin was richly tanned. A symphony in brown. She sat erect, poised and assured. Young. But the sort of person you would have referred to as a woman rather than a girl by the time she was twenty, because of her composure. French, obviously. Everything about the way she was turned out—clothes, jewellery, hair—had that little bit of flair which the English girl, no matter how hard she tries, seems unable to match.

By the time her drink had arrived, she could not help but be aware that Stafford had been looking at her. She looked across at him and returned his gaze frankly. She smiled, then turned away to sample her drink.

Although perhaps it had been just the polite smile of one hotel guest to another, Stafford emerged from the exchange quite shaken. Perhaps there was more to her smile than that? No. The next thing that happens, of course, is that her husband joins her and that's that.

But when he was ordering his third Pernod still no husband

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had arrived to join her. Other people had come out to the terrace, and greeted her as they took their places at various tables. But still she sat there alone.

Quite openly she had looked back at him each time that again, purely by chance, he had happened to be looking in her direction.

He got up to move to her table. After all, they were guests at the same hotel—not complete strangers to each other, like two people in a public restaurant or a bar.

She nodded affably; she had no objection at all to his joining her.

His waiter delivered his drink there and went off with Stafford's order for a fresh drink for her. Englishmen—what a time they take to get around to these things, their conscience or something.

She was indeed French. Her English was not as good as his French, so it was mainly in her own language that they talked.

"How is it that you speak such good French?" she asked.

"Monetti and Stafford of London, wine and spirits merchants since 1782. I'm back and forth to France all the time."

"You've spent a holiday here at Tourville before?"

"I'm not on holiday. I'm just here for the evening."

It seemed to strike her as odd that anyone would spend just one night at a resort hotel.

"I'm on my way back from Paris," he explained. "I had some business over at Fécamp. They make a fairly good liqueur there."

She smiled. "Benedictine *is* quite good."

"I thought I'd spend the evening here before getting the boat back to England tomorrow."

Conversation came easily. There was a charm about her that augmented her good looks. Stafford was captivated.

But there was something that puzzled him. She had been staying at the hotel for a fortnight, was leaving in the morning to return to Paris. She was not married—or at least she wore no wedding ring. One would have thought that in two weeks at the hotel she would have linked up with some of the other guests, would have become one of a group that spent their time together, as is the usual thing at a holiday hotel. But she appeared to be no part of the various groups of guests with which the terrace was well filled. Not only that. There were several personable young men to be seen about the place. How was it that in two weeks none had reached the stage

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when it was one of them, rather than he, who was now sitting at the green table with her?

They had dinner together. This further surprised him. He had expected, when he said, "Would you care to join me for dinner?" that it would have been, "Thank you very much but—" Instead, she had smiled and said she would like that.

Halfway through dinner he realised that their conversation, which had come so readily and continued now without any of the awkward pauses that can crop up between two people newly acquainted, had a definite one-way aspect to it. He had been telling her, at her interested questioning, all sorts of things about himself.

Not just superficial things but much more personal matters. Like why he had reached thirty-two and wasn't married yet—several near misses just hadn't come off for one reason or another. About how he had not really wanted to go into the wine and spirits business but his father had insisted.

"There's always been a Stafford in the firm. We ran out of Monettis about eighty years ago but it was a matter of pride to my father that there must always be a Stafford."

"What did you really want to do?"

"I wanted to be a writer."

"What sort of writer?"

"A playwright. At university I was a great one for the Dramatic Society. I wanted to go on after university into the theatre. That's the way to really learn how to put a play together."

"But your father was against it?"

"Altogether too arty for my father. He doesn't regard that sort of thing as honest work. So—it was Monetti and Stafford for me."

"But surely you can combine the two. You can still write, even if you're working for your father's firm."

Stafford had shrugged his shoulders. "I get all sorts of ideas for things I'd like to write but I never get around to putting them on paper. I suppose it's right what they say."

"What do they say?"

"The person who wanted to do something and didn't, never really wanted to."

She had not been forthcoming with such confidences.

He had learned that she came originally from Corbeil, just outside Paris. She worked in Paris. But at what? "Oh, let's not talk about my work. I've come here to relax and forget about work."

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Always she had steered the conversation away from anything really personal about herself. Why?

They spent the rest of the evening in the hotel's casino, gambling moderately.

When the gambling had palled and most of the other guests had retired for the night, Stafford was reluctant to end their evening together, for each to go their separate ways next morning. He had become more and more intrigued by her. Playing *boule,* her arm had happened to brush against his as, excitedly, she watched for their number to come up. The contact was electrifying. To her, also, it seemed. She glanced around at him with a surprised look and then smiled warmly.

What does one do now, he asked himself, as they came out of the gaming room into the lobby. The town of Tourville had nothing to offer at that hour. A stroll along the beach for a breath of fresh air? That was a bit corny.

"Would you like to come up and have a drink before you go to bed?"

She took the words right out of his mouth.

This woman I can't fathom, he reflected, as they got their keys at the desk and then went up to the second floor.

It was a large suite, much more elegant than the small room at the back which was all he had been able to get. The French windows of the sitting room let out to a balcony overlooking the swimming-pool to the Channel beyond, and it was there that they had their drink in the mellow night air.

There was no moon, but it wasn't really necessary. He kissed her and she responded, tenderly, with quiet acquiescence.

Lying with her on the broad, comfortable bed, with the sound of the sea just audible now that all was quiet in the hotel, he was troubled anew by—what was it, his Englishman's conscience? But this was quite outside his field of experience, to meet someone for the first time and then, by tacit agreement, just a matter of couple of hours later, to be together as they were now.

Was she some sort of high-class courtesan? Her clothes, jewellery, this suite, everything about her bespoke money. What sort of job could she do that would run to this? No, she couldn't be that sort of person. Or at least he didn't want her to be. Perhaps it was family wealth and she worked merely for something to occupy her mind. But if so, why be reticent about it? Why was it that even now she had still told him practically nothing about herself?

The only sort of disclosure she had made to him was the

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simple statement: "I wanted you to talk to me down there on the terrace. I wanted to make love to you."

Why to him? Was he just one of numerous men to whom this had happened? But if that were so, surely some of the other men they had encountered during the course of the evening would have shown in some way that they knew her. But beyond their admiration of her from a distance there was no sort of recognition exchanged between her and any of the men there, either hotel guests or visitors to the casino.

Then, afterwards, she said, "Goodbye, Paul."

Not goodnight—*goodbye*. He hated the sound of finality about it.

"We'll be seeing each other again," he said. "You give me your address in Paris and—"

"No."

"But we've got to see each other again."

She shook her head.

"But that's ridiculous," he said. "We can't meet each other like this and have a wonderful evening together and then say, 'So long, we may bump into one another again some time.'"

"Perhaps it was a mistake. I shouldn't have made love to you."

"But you wanted to!"

"Of course I did."

"I know what," he said. "You could stay on for a while. I don't have to hurry back to London."

"I must get back to Paris."

He felt anguished. "This is crazy."

"It isn't crazy. I've loved our evening together. But there it ends."

"Why, for heaven's sake!"

"It's best that way."

"Not as far as I'm concerned. I must see you again."

"You don't understand."

"Don't understand what?"

She reached out and touched his cheek. "Goodnight, Paul."

"I'm not going until you tell me—"

"I can't tell you anything. Don't be unhappy. Just say to yourself, 'This was rather wonderful. I shall always remember this.' That's what I shall do."

In the morning she was gone when he came down to pay his bill and leave for the harbour. He had had little sleep. He

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had been too disturbed in his mind to get to sleep properly when he got back to his room.

And when he was in London again, constantly his thoughts turned to her. Making love to him she had been so affectionate, tender, unhurried and understanding. Why then say that it must end there?

But he was no fool. He had not left her suite that night without exercising some initiative.

On his next trip to Paris ("Why do you have to go back so soon?" his father asked him, without getting a convincing reply), he hired a car and drove the twenty kilometres or so out to Corbeil.

He asked the driver to find the *avenue Laroche* for him and then to stop at *numéro* 38. It was a small apartment block. He found out which was Madame Clairmont's flat and went up and knocked on the door.

It was some time before it was answered. He had to knock again. Madame Clairmont was a middle-aged woman, well dressed. The flat was well-appointed.

"I'm a friend of your daughter," he said. "May I come in?"

She hesitated for a moment, then beckoned for him to enter.

"I met her at Tourville," he said by way of explanation, when they were in the *salon.*

"How did you know where I live? She didn't tell you, did she?"

"No. She didn't tell me."

She waited for him to enlarge on this, but he didn't. Somewhat furtive, perhaps, the way he had done it. But he just had to see Lucienne again. In her suite there had been a little pile of letters on the hall table, ready for mailing. The top one was addressed to *Madame R. Clairmont, avenue Laroche 38, Corbeil.* It had not been difficult to memorise it. He knew Lucienne's home had been in Corbeil, so it was a fairly good bet that Madame Clairmont was her mother.

"I want to see Lucienne," he said, when he had formally introduced himself. "Would you tell me where I could find her in Paris?"

Madame Clairmont shook her head.

"But we had a pleasant time there at Tourville. I'd like very much to see her again."

"It would not be a good idea."

"Why not?"

"There are some things that are better to leave as they are."

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"What do you mean?"

"If my daughter had wished you to have her address, she would have given it to you, would she not?"

"I suppose that's true."

"Therefore, *monsieur*, don't you think it best not to pursue this any further?"

"No. We got on so well together. I don't see why—"

"Tell me something, will you? My daughter and you—" She broke off, looking at him closely. "How well do you know my daughter?"

"I was only at Tourville for that one evening."

"I see."

Madame Clairmont was not at her ease. Her face—definite family resemblance, she must have been as attractive as Lucienne in her youth—had a disturbed look. There were lines of worry there.

"May I give you a piece of advice," she said. "*Please* don't try to see any more of her. Forget about meeting her at Tourville. Forget about her altogether."

After a few more minutes of this unsatisfactory talk with Madame Clairmont he might have left the flat, frustrated and bewildered, had it not been for the fact that he had seen something. In a chair in one corner of the room was a handbag. He had noticed it when he first came in, but looking at it again he realised that it was of a type that a woman of her age would not choose for herself.

He pointed to it. "Lucienne's?" Before she could answer, Lucienne had appeared at a door from the rear of the flat.

Stafford had no hesitation in going to her and embracing her. She responded, to a degree, holding herself in check as her mother watched. The woman shook her head unhappily.

"I'm going to tell him, *maman*," Lucienne said to her.

Henri Domergue was not an easy man to get an interview with. It was quite futile to go to his penthouse suite of offices in the Domergue Building, just off the *rue de Rivoli*, and ask to see him. Nor would letters and phone calls to his secretariat get one an appointment, unless there was a very good reason.

Domergue was kept excessively busy with his industrial interests, his Government dealings and his political weekly which made no money, was not intended to, but was of untold influence. Domergue saw no reason why he should spare the time to grant Stafford an interview.

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But there came a time when *he* wanted to see Stafford.

Stafford was summoned to the Domergue penthouse by a telephone call to his hotel. How did Domergue know he was in Paris at that particular time and where he was staying? When you were a person such as Domergue you knew everything that was going on, or at least had ways of finding out whatever you wanted to know.

When Stafford arrived in his office there was no preamble. Domergue went straight to the point.

"I want you to stop bothering Lucienne," he said.

"I'm not *bothering* her."

"She has told you she doesn't want to see you any more."

"Has she?"

"That's what I told her to do."

"Well, you may be interested to learn that in this case she hasn't been very good at carrying out your orders."

Domergue, a big man with thick lips that were not his only unattractive feature, was wearing dark glasses. It was not to counteract the glare of sunshine from the floor-to-ceiling windows that occupied two walls of the huge office. There was no sunshine, only the murky gloom of winter outside.

He took the glasses off now to see more clearly this man who spoke to him with a bluntness he wasn't used to. And Stafford realised the truth of the comment he had heard about Domergue—"he has to wear dark glasses because his eyes frighten little children."

"I'd like to tell you something for your own good," said Domergue. "It would be in your best interests not to see Lucienne any more."

"Sorry, but I fully intend to see a lot more of her. I want to marry her. She wants to marry me. She is coming with me, to England."

"She would not be so unwise as to do that."

"Why not?"

"She knows what would happen if she left me."

"What would happen?"

"She has always known."

"What?"

Domergue replaced his glasses. "I would wreck her marriage. Also her mother would suffer."

"You can't throw out threats like that!"

"They are not threats. They are just basic facts about our association."

"But you can't hold a person in bondage."

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"Can't I?"

"No. She's free to—"

"She's not."

Domergue indicated one of the chairs in front of his desk. "You may sit down, Mr. Stafford."

"I'll stand, thanks."

"I'll tell you about Lucienne and then you can go quietly on your way and not bother her any more. She was nothing when I picked her up in Corbeil. That was eight years ago now. She was working in the printing plant there and I saw her when I went to arrange about the printing of my paper. She typed letters, made coffee, ran errands. Her father was worthless. He's dead now, fortunately. Her mother did her best to keep the family together. They were poor, they had nothing, do you understand?"

"I understand."

"But I saw that there was something she *did* have—an inherent beauty. I could see that if something were done about her clothes and the way she did her hair and things like that, she could be a beautiful young woman. Also, from talking to her I realised that she was not a stupid person. She was bright. All that was needed was to develop her mind. It fascinated me—the idea of taking her in hand and making something of her. So I set her mother up in a nice apartment in Corbeil and I brought Lucienne here to work for me. I have devoted much time and thought to developing Lucienne into the attractive, intelligent woman she is today. It is something of which one can feel justifiably proud."

"That's not very convincing."

Domergue showed his anger. Normally no-one dared to talk to him like this.

Stafford said, "You make it sound like some sociological experiment. Quite objective on your part. But it wasn't so at all."

"What do you mean?"

"What was she expected to do in return for all you'd done for her? All right, you don't need to say it. It doesn't worry me, because that's all over now."

"All I have asked from her," said Domergue, almost shouting now, "is her loyalty. And she has given me her loyalty. She can go where she likes and do what she pleases and I know she will not have anything to do with anybody. I trust her. If you think she's interested in you, just because you happened to bump into her here in Paris—"

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"Your spy system isn't a hundred per cent efficient."

"What!"

"It doesn't matter."

"Just because you may have met her a couple of times and become infatuated by her, that doesn't mean she has any interest in you. You may want to marry her. A lot of men want to marry her. But she is loyal to *me*, out of gratitude for all I've done for her."

"And you expect her to spend the rest of her life just being grateful to you?"

"I'm entitled to her gratitude."

"Tell me," said Stafford. "If what you did for Lucienne was just an impersonal experiment wouldn't it be logical that the next step would be for you to want her to make a happy marriage?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because she's mine."

"But you can't marry her yourself."

"That's out of the question."

"And she has no say in the matter? She wants to marry me but you—"

"Look here, Mr. Stafford, she doesn't want to marry you. You may think she does. But I know she wouldn't do anything as ill-considered as that. She would live to regret it. Take my advice. Don't be a fool. Don't involve yourself in something that's quite out of your depth. Marry some charming English girl. Don't pester Lucienne. Do you understand? *Don't pester Lucienne.*"

Madame Clairmont did not want to leave Corbeil. No amount of persuasion could change her mind.

"I have always lived in Corbeil," she said. "All my friends are here. This is my whole life. I am too old now to take up roots and go to live in England."

They were fearful of what might happen to her. But she said, "All M. Domergue could do to me is murder me in my bed and I don't think he would do that."

"Don't say things like that, *maman*," said Lucienne, distressed. "We just don't know what he's likely to do."

"Don't worry about me. Your happiness is the main thing. I shall be all right."

They debated it at length with her, feeling that they could not rightly go off and leave her. But she was adamant. She

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would of course move out of the flat. She would stay with a family who were old friends, so they would know she would not be alone.

"I feel released from a terrible burden;" she said to Lucienne. "I am so happy that it is ended now and you can make your own life."

Back in Paris, Lucienne just walked out of her flat, leaving everything there. She and Stafford flew to London and were married on the morning after their arrival.

Stafford's father approved of the marriage. About time Paul got married and settled down, and what an admirable choice. But it was a matter of added concern to Stafford that he had not told his father the full story of Lucienne.

He had no physical fear of Domergue. Domergue had not said or inferred: *If you take her away from me I'll kill you.* Domergue had no need to go into such melodramatics. He had the twin weapons of wealth and influence. Stafford knew from what he had heard about men who had tried to cross Domergue in business how vindictive and ruthless he could be.

For himself, Stafford was quite prepared to face up to anything Domergue might try to do to him; he and Lucienne were so in love that they had resolved that they would go through with this thing no matter what the consequences. But his father—it would be disastrous if his father became involved.

Monetti and Stafford were vulnerable. Much of the firm's business was done with France. In fact their dealings with French companies formed the backbone of their business. A man as powerful as Domergue could find means of disrupting those contacts, even though they had continued for so long.

But weeks went by and became months, and there was no indication that Domergue had made any sort of move against his father's firm. There was no sign at all of Domergue carrying out any of his threats. In the regular phone calls Lucienne made to her mother, Madame Clairmont had nothing to report as regards Domergue. New people had moved into her old flat. If Domergue had visited Corbeil she had seen nothing of him and had heard nothing from him.

The tension, for Stafford and Lucienne, relaxed somewhat. They reached the stage when they could feel almost carefree about their life together. She was popular with his friends. She was a wonderful hostess at the parties they gave. Her English improved rapidly, so her initial self-consciousness about that was soon removed. She was great fun. They were very happy together.

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Then Domergue came back into their lives.

Normally there was not much more than a month or so between Stafford's Paris visits. Now his excuses to his father for getting someone else in the firm to make the trip were starting to wear thin. It was one of the main aspects of his work at Monetti and Stafford. He could not put off going back to Paris any longer.

His two days there appeared to be uneventful. It seemed that nothing untoward was going to happen.

Just before he was due to leave he was to have a meal with one of the men he had come over to see and by then he was chiding himself for being so apprehensive. The two of them were seated in the lobby of a restaurant having a drink while they waited for their table to be free.

They were in earnest conversation when Stafford was conscious that one of a group of people who had emerged from the restaurant had stopped a few feet from him. He looked up, to see Domergue. Domergue had taken off his dark glasses. His cold, cruel eyes were fixed on Stafford.

It is difficult to assess time in such a situation. To Stafford it seemed like a full minute that Domergue stood there looking down at him. In fact it was probably no more than ten seconds. But it was long enough to be noticeable to people around and embarrassing to the woman—Domergue's wife?—and the two young men—his sons?—who had to stand waiting for him at the exit.

Stafford felt an eerie shiver run through his body, under the glaring eyes. What was in that look? Hatred? Jealousy? Pent-up anger against this Englishman who had caused his loss of self-esteem, who had done something to which he was not accustomed, who had defied him?

Then abruptly Domergue turned away, replacing his glasses as he strode over to the waiting trio. Obsequious staff ushered them out of the doorway.

When Stafford was back in London and told Lucienne about it, she said, "What do you think it means?"

"It means we're free of him. He's not going to do anything. We don't need to worry any more."

She put her arms around him and hugged him closely. "Thank God, darling."

A week or so before they would have been married for a year, Stafford returned from his day at the office and announced, "I have a little surprise for you."

"What is it, dear?"

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"A little celebration for our first anniversary." He produced an envelope. "Our travel tickets and hotel reservation."

"Where to?"

"Now, where would you think?"

"I've no idea."

He gave her a quizzical look. "By any chance do you happen to remember a place in Tourville called the Hotel Grand-Casino?"

She embraced him happily.

"I thought it might be fun to go back there," he said.

"Wonderful!"

They arrived at the hotel in the late afternoon. When they had bathed and changed they went downstairs. At the top of the steps leading to the terrace by the swimming-pool, they paused. The same coloured tables and chairs, few of them occupied as yet—good nostalgic timing.

"Tell you what we'll do," said Stafford.

"What?"

"You go down there and sit at the green table and I'll go over to the blue one."

She caught the mood. "All right, darling. You know, I was so worried that afternoon that you wouldn't pluck up the courage to come over and talk to me; I'm so glad you did."

One of the few guests on the terrace looked at them oddly as they separated and went to different tables. Had they had a tiff? It didn't appear so. They seemed quite happy about the arrangement. A honeymoon couple perhaps, playing some strange sort of game between each other...

Stafford called his waiter over.

"How much do I owe you?"

The waiter counted the little stack of saucers Stafford had accumulated as he had sat there daydreaming.

"Six Pernods, *m'sieur*. That will be—"

"I've had six. Good heavens!" Stafford handed him some notes and indicated he could keep the change.

The waiter thanked him effusively as he got up and set off towards the hotel, past the green table where now a middle-aged English-looking couple had seated themselves.

As he was going into the dining room for dinner, Stafford noticed coming down from upstairs the woman who had been sitting at the green table, now on the arm of the big man with the thick lips and dark glasses who had joined her earlier out on the terrace.

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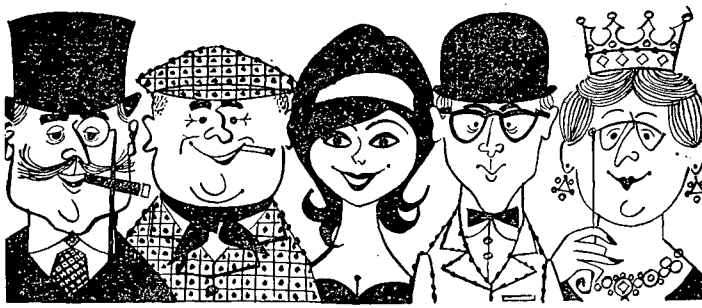

You meet such interesting people!

Waiting for dinner in his castle, the Duke of —— impatiently consulted his watch. It had stopped. Asking one of his guests for the time he complained, "I can't understand it. My man usually winds the thing up before he puts it on me." ATTICUS, *Sunday Times*, 27 *May*, 1956

Cut for a Caper

There was a young man of the Cape
Who always wore trousers of crêpe;
When asked, "Don't they tear?"
He replied, "Here and there;
But they keep such a beautiful shape."

OLIVER HERFORD

Spectacular Devotion

Will I ever forget the spectacle, that fine spring morning, when opposite Horse Guards Barracks an off-white Mercedes, suffering from Diplomatic Immunity, pulled to a Teutonic halt, a chauffeur opened the back door and, from a cushion, picked up what I can only describe as a piece of knotted string with legs. Carrying it like the Crown Jewels, he crossed Rotten Row and deposited the creature on the grass, where it sat for an hour blinking in the unaccustomed sunlight. From the rear window of the car, a doting, aging Brunhild watched its every move through a pair of opera glasses. One's spirits soared at this gesture of man's selfless devotion to his dog... SPIKE MILLIGAN, *The Little Pot Boiler*

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Clubbable

One of the great characters of the (Oriental) club is Alice Moore, who became the first waitress in 1916.

Alice can remember many odd characters. There was the doctor who refused to pay for a penny biscuit with his sherry and left £90,000 in his will... There was Switch Box Willy, who used to pull out all the light switches when nobody was watching. There was old Musk Rat who never had a meal or a drink but started reading the newspapers every day at 2.15 until 6.30 p.m. when he departed. If, when reading a leading article, he decided not to like it, he would shout out, "Damn it, what a bloody fool the man is!" He was called the Musk Rat because he used to run round the corner of the room and never walk across it. At least, he left £500 to the staff. Another member used to order coffee and a cigar, light the cigar, fall asleep and set fire to the chair. He did this fourteen times.

CHARLES GRAVES, *Leather Armchairs*

The mild Hindoos have household gods
To which they bow each day and night;
But they are not such senseless clods
To celebrate this curious rite,
For I am just as mad as they
Appear—I have a little bust,
A little bust of Thackeray,
And nightly to it in the dust
I bow the head and bend the knee
In strict routine's solemnity.

Myself when young and poor and rash
Discovered William Makepeace T.,
His writings collared all my cash,
Attention, leisure, sympathy.
The world, the flesh, the cares of self,
Time passing, drive our youth away;
But still there stand upon my shelf
The bust and tomes of Thackeray;
And though I rarely read him now
I make him my diurnal bow.

For every night I close my door,
Disrobe myself, and then before
Great Thackeray and all his works
Perform my course of physical jerks.

FRANK ARTHUR, *Adipose Idolatry*

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Shaw's Shake

I am overwhelmingly convinced that you want a change of some sort—or a shake. Once, in Bayonne, I snatched Charlotte from the tomb by suddenly, in desperation, rolling her about and pummelling her from head to foot, whereupon, amazed into a protest of all her vital forces, she got up *well*, to the stupefaction of her sister, who had despaired of her life.
G. B. SHAW, *Letter to Mrs. P. Campbell*, 8 December, 1912

O my aged Uncle Arly!
Sitting on a heap of Barley
Thro' the silent hours of night—
Close beside a leafy thicket:
On his nose there was a Cricket—
In his hat a Railway-Ticket
(But his shoes were far too tight).

EDWARD LEAR

A Collector's Peace

The Rev. Mr. Hagemore, who lived at Calthorn in Leicestershire, kept one servant of each sex, whom he locked up every night. His last employment in the evening was to go round his premises, let loose his dogs, and fire his guns. Going on the morning of the 1st January, 1746, as usual to release his servants, one of his dogs suddenly fawned upon him, and threw him into a pond, where the water was breast high. His servants heard him call for assistance, but being unable to quit their prison, he was drowned.

At the time of his death, he had thirty gowns and cassocks, fifty-eight dogs, one hundred pair of breeches, one hundred pair of boots, four hundred pair of shoes, eight wigs—though he always wore his own hair—eighty waggons and carts, eighty ploughs . . .

KIRBY, *Wonderful and Eccentric Museum*, 1820

Cheers!

There was a mad fashion among riotous drinkers about 1792, *of eating the wine glass—biting a piece out, grinding it with the teeth, and actually swallowing—the enjoyment being to see how an aspirant cut his mouth!*

ROBERT SOUTHEY, *Commonplace Book*

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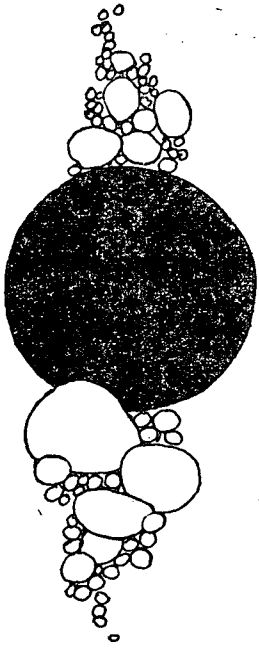
ROUNDEST STONE ON THE ISLAND

by John Cohane



FOR eighteen consecutive months Stockman had worked hard. Too hard, claimed his wife. His doctor agreed when he found Stockman's blood pressure up twelve points.

Two weeks later the Stockmans were aboard a chartered yacht steaming south from Naples to Sicily, eastward across the Aeolian Sea, into the Ionian Sea, on to the island of Scheria.

They dropped anchor in the twin-bayed harbour on the rocky north-west coast, slept each night aboard the yacht, dined at the small hotel just off the beach. Each morning at eleven they left with a picnic in an outboard boat piloted by a young fisherman, spent the day at one of the nearby lonely beaches, returned to the yacht each afternoon at five.

The first few days Stockman was restless. The July sun blazed down out of a cloudless sky. He would read the London newspapers in the shade while his wife drifted, naked, lazily on her rubber raft.

"What's the good of getting tanned all over," he asked, "when there's no-one to see you except me?"

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"That's true," agreed his wife. "But the sun's very healthy. Think of the resistance I'm building up for next winter."

Stockman would swim for half an hour before lunch. After lunch he would sun for twenty minutes, swim again, wander along the shore, fidget in the shade, try to read a book.

It was the morning of the fourth day when he began to study the stones on the beach. What looked like white sand from a distance, was in fact thousands upon thousands of stones, ranging in size from pebbles to small rocks, mostly light in colour, of every conceivable shape.

There were egg-shaped stones, almond-shaped stones, pear-shaped stones, kidney-shaped stones, turnip-shaped stones, cucumber-shaped stones, bean-shaped stones, potato-shaped stones, fig-shaped stones. Some, which had fallen recently from the cliffs above, had rough, jagged edges. Most of them had been worn smooth by the sea.

While he was swimming after lunch he noticed under the water a stone which was almost round. "Look at that," he said, taking it to his wife.

"It's lovely," she said.

"Look how round it is," he continued.

"More egg-shaped," she replied. "I'm certain there are lots of stones rounder than that one."

"Probably," he agreed, tossing it back in the water. He gazed at the crescent beach, then walked slowly along the edge of the sea, occasionally picking up a stone, inspecting it, throwing it away when he saw it wasn't completely round. Shortly after four o'clock he found one which was the roundest of all.

"What about that?" he asked his wife.

"That's a beauty," she said, looking up from her deck chair. "It's really round." He took the stone back in the boat to the yacht.

"Have you ever seen a stone rounder than that?" he asked Spyro, the owner of the hotel, during dinner. Spyro glanced at the stone.

"Oh sure," he said. "There are lots rounder than that." He rolled the stone across the surface of the table. It bumped and jiggled before it ended up against a fork. "That's not round at all."

"I must say I don't like Spyro," Stockman said later to his wife when they were back on the yacht. "He's too damned cocky. I'll bet he's never seen a stone as round as that one."

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He had very carefully placed the stone in a dish on the bar.

"How can you tell?" questioned his wife. "After all Spyro was born here. You've only been here four days."

"What difference does that make?" asked Stockman. "I'll bet he's never even looked for a round stone."

The next morning he was up early. By quarter to eleven he was ready to leave for the beach. "Today," he announced to his wife, "I'm going to find a stone so round Spyro will have to admit it's the roundest stone he's ever seen."

"I'll bet you can," agreed his wife.

He didn't bother to sit in the shade and read the newspapers. He started right out looking for stones, took a half hour off for lunch, spent the rest of the afternoon combing the beach. He couldn't find a stone as round as the one he had found the day before.

The next morning he said to the young fisherman who waited for them each day beyond the rocks at the next beach, "Nico, you find a stone rounder than this one and I'll give you a hundred *drachmas.*"

When Nico returned at five o'clock he had with him a stone much rounder than the first one. Stockman had also found a much rounder one.

"Which do you think?" he asked his wife.

"I don't know," she answered. "They're both very round. Why not let Spyro decide?"

"Right," he said. He gave Nico one hundred *drachmas.* "Good boy, Nico. You win. Tomorrow we'll try again."

That night he took the two stones ashore. He called Spyro over to their table. "What about those?" he asked.

"Much better," said Spyro looking at the stones, taking one up in either hand.

"Which is rounder?" asked Stockman.

"This one," said Spyro, indicating the one Stockman had found.

"I think you're right," laughed Stockman.

Spyro rolled the two stones across the table. One of them ran slightly off to the left. The other bumped sharply every time it turned over. "Of course they're not round," added Spyro.

"I'll tell you what," said Stockman. "You've got six or eight boys working here. They don't have much to do between meals. If they can find a rounder stone than this one, or one that Nico and I can find in the next three days, I'll give you a thousand *drachmas.*"

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"Who'll be the judge?" asked Spyro.

"What about the mayor?" suggested Stockman. The mayor from the village was sitting at a nearby table.

"Okay," said Spyro. "It's a deal."

When they were going to bed Stockman's wife said, "One thousand *drachmas* must be a lot of money."

"Oh no," he replied. "Only about thirty dollars."

"Don't you want to see some of the other islands?" she asked.

"You're getting a wonderful tan," he said. "Aren't you happy here?"

"Of course. It makes me seasick when we move. As long as you're happy it's fine with me."

"I love it here," he exclaimed. "Just the sort of place I like."

During the next three days, searching from ten in the morning until six in the evening, Nico and Stockman found five stones rounder than the first two. One of Nico's was the roundest. On the third night the Stockmans took it with them to dinner.

After dinner Spyro brought out his stone. They placed them both on the table in front of the mayor. He adjusted his spectacles, examined them closely under a light, rolled them about on the table, on a plate, on the floor.

"Good," he finally said. "Both good. About the same. But not round."

"Which is rounder?" asked Spyro.

"Both the same," repeated the mayor.

"I think he's right," said Stockman picking up both stones. "Okay, Spyro. I'll keep the stones. Here's one thousand *drachmas*. Split it up among the boys. They did a good job."

Later, aboard the yacht, he placed the stones in separate plates on the bar.

"How many stones do you think there are on the beaches of Scheria?" he asked his wife.

"Millions," she said. "There must be millions. Probably over one hundred million."

"Nearer a billion I should think. Somewhere there's an absolutely round stone. There has to be. Just on the law of averages."

"It would be sheer luck if you found it," she cautioned him.

"I'll bet I can do it," he said. "But I need help. What's the date?"

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"July 11th."

"Figure four days back to Naples by the first of August. That leaves seventeen days. I'll bet I can do it."

When his wife was asleep Stockman went out on deck. He walked up and down, up and down, then returned to the cabin, clicked on the lights, sat down at the desk, started drawing up a set of rules . . .

The next morning he didn't go with his wife to the beach. He sat on the terrace of the hotel for several hours with Spyro. When they had finished Spyro drove into town. The following afternoon posters appeared all over the island:

100,000 DRACHMAS
for
THE ROUNDEST STONE
on Scheria
Second Prize—30,000 *Drachmas*
Third Prize—10,000 *Drachmas*
25 *Consolation Prizes*—1,000 *Drachmas each*

A list of details followed. Final selections to be made on July 27th at 6 p.m. at the bandstand in the public square. There would be five judges—three village mayors, Spyro and Stockman. All stones would be stamped with numbers. Contestants to receive certificates with corresponding numbers. Anyone over ten years of age, tourists and residents alike, could enter.

"The whole contest will set me back less than six thousand dollars." Stockman explained to his wife. "Besides I can probably take it off my taxes."

For the next two weeks everyone in Scheria searched for the roundest stone on the island—shepherds, fishermen, waiters, farmers, bartenders, shopkeepers, boatmen, students, policemen, cab-drivers, tourists, soldiers, sailors, innkeepers. The beaches were crawling with people, male and female, old and young, sick and well. Some came specially from as far away as Venice, Athens and Rome.

When the contest closed at noon on the 27th there were 5,278 entries. All afternoon the five judges sorted out the stones in a back room at police headquarters. By six o'clock over 8.000 people were gathered in the public square. At 6.30 the judges filed through the crowd, mounted the bandstand. Spyro held up one hand for silence.

"The first prize," he shouted, "has been awarded to stone number 1,723."

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A roar of delight, drowning out murmurs of disappointment, went up from a distant corner of the crowd. A young tailor's assistant was carried jubilantly on the shoulders of friends to the bandstand, received a cheque for 100,000 *drachmas,* caused momentary confusion when he asked for his stone.

"No, no," explained Stockman, his face flushed with excitement. "The three winning stones belong to me."

"It doesn't say so in the rules," protested the tailor's assistant.

"Why do you think Mr. Stockman's paying you 100,000 *drachmas*?" shouted Spyro. "Come on. We have to announce the rest of the winners."

The tailor's assistant, still protesting, climbed down from the bandstand, and disappeared into the crowd.

By the time the other twenty-seven prizes had been announced, everyone seemed happy. The crowd was in a jovial mood, laughing, cheering, singing. The five judges, their wives and other celebrities retired to a restaurant overlooking the public square. Several times Stockman, in response to applause from below, went out on the balcony and waved to the crowd. Toasts were drunk. During dinner the second and third prize-winning stones disappeared from a sideboard.

"Oh well," said Stockman. "It doesn't matter. I only wanted the roundest stone on the island." It was tucked safely in a side pocket of his sports jacket, 3½ inches in diameter, smooth and round, light beige in colour.

Just as the dinner ended, the chief of police came in and explained he had locked up the tailor's assistant. "He says he doesn't want the 100,000 *drachmas*. He wants his stone."

"What's the matter with him?" shouted Spyro. "His whole family hasn't seen 100,000 *drachmas* in the last five years. They've been walking barefoot on stones since they were born. Don't worry, Mr. Stockman. You'll be gone in the morning."

When they returned to the yacht Stockman and his wife went to the main cabin. He took the stone out of his pocket, perched it carefully on a sherry glass.

"Have you ever seen anything like it?" he asked. "I'll bet there's not a rounder stone anywhere in the world."

"It's exquisite," agreed his wife. "And to think it's fashioned by the greatest craftsmen of them all, Mother Nature."

"I'm going to have it mounted on a beautiful gold base," explained Stockman. "Rather like a large golf tee. Maybe I can get someone like Dali to design it."

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"Wonderful," said his wife. She carefully took the stone off the sherry glass, held it up in front of the light. "It isn't one hundred per cent round, is it? There's just the tiniest little bulge here on this side."

"That's right," admitted Stockman. "We all noticed it. But it was head and shoulders over the others. In a class by itself. You'd never find a stone that's perfectly round. Not in a million years."

"Why not have the bulge rubbed down smooth?" suggested his wife.

"Are you kidding?" protested Stockman. "That would be sacrilege. You might as well mount a ball-bearing. Besides it would show. There were eight or ten tampered entries and you could spot them right away. This stays as it is, worn smooth and round by the endless motion of the sea."

"Who do you suppose stole the other two?" asked his wife.

"Personally," replied Stockman, "I suspect Spyro. But who cares. No-one's going to get this one." He locked it in the safe behind the bar and they went to bed.

They were to sail the next morning at eight. Before seven-thirty they were awakened by noises from the beach. "There's a big crowd to see us off," said Stockman, peering through the porthole.

"How nice," exclaimed his wife. They dressed and hurried on deck.

There were two or three hundred people lining the shore, waving towards the yacht. The Stockmans waved back. A group of school children sang a song. As the anchor was being hauled up from the bottom, the Stockmans heard the approaching sound of rhythmic, staccato chanting.

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Stockman alarmed.

"More singers," Stockman reassured her.

A moment later a column of young men, two abreast, clad in black trousers and white shirts, appeared round a bend in the road. The first two men carried a large white banner lettered in black. They marched past the hotel, pushed their way through the crowd, lined up along the edge of the shore. Again and again they chanted the same insistent phrase.

"What are they saying?" Stockman asked the second mate, who understood modern Greek. "It sounds like a college cheer."

"I think it's . . . yes, they're saying, '*Give us our stone. Give us our stone.*' That's what's written on the banner too."

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"Let's get going," urged Stockman. He studied the group through a pair of binoculars. "Well, I'll be damned. There's Spyro. With the demonstrators."

"Are you certain?" asked his wife. "Maybe he's trying to reason with them."

"Not at all," said Stockman. "He's one of the two carrying the banner. Full speed ahead, Captain!"

As the yacht moved forward, turning slowly in a gentle arc parallel to the curve of the bay, a tall, bearded monk, dressed in a long, flowing robe, broke through the crowd, rushed to the water's edge and raising his hands in the air, began to shout at the top of his voice.

"What's he doing?" asked Mrs. Stockman. "Giving us his blessing?"

"I don't think so," replied Stockman. "He looks awfully mad."

As they came alongside the monk, he scrambled about on the shore, picked up a stone and flung it at the yacht. It fell several feet short.

"Step on it," bellowed Stockman.

The bow of the yacht swung around towards the open sea. The monk lifted up his robes, waded into the water, dropped his robes, reached down and picked up another stone. This one he hurled straight as a die at Stockman. It grazed his right temple, struck an upright steel cabin support, crashed to the deck, rolled swiftly and silently aft.

"Get it," roared Stockman. "It's the roundest stone of all." Wiping the blood from his face he raced along the deck, collided head-on with the third mate.

"Got it," shouted the third mate, picking up the stone and handing it to Stockman.

"Good boy," roared Stockman. He rushed to his wife. "Look. It's absolutely one hundred per cent perfectly round."

"It's a miracle!" exclaimed Mrs. Stockman. "The hand of God. But darling, what about your head?"

"To hell with my head!" laughed Stockman. "That's a small price to pay." He turned the stone over in his hands, let out a dreadful moan. "Oh no! Look!" Running across the other side of the stone was a newly-made, deep, jagged gash. "That crazy monk. He's undone the work of thousands of years."

"What shall I do?" asked the captain uncertainly.

"Do?" echoed Stockman. "Keep going, of course. What else is there to do?"

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In the cabin before dinner Stockman was mixing a batch of dry martinis. Occasionally as he glanced at the two stones perched on the bar he ruefully shook his neatly-bandaged head.

"Someone's always taking the joy out of life," he finally said. "What do I have to show for all that time and work? A piece of damaged goods and a second rater."

"What about the Venus de Milo?" asked his wife. "She's missing both arms."

"Oh I know," sighed Stockman. "But this is different. What we were searching for was perfection. The whole idea was to find perfection."

When he had finished his first martini he stood up, walked over, took one stone in each hand. "There's no compromise with perfection," he said quietly. He strode out on deck, hesitated for an instant, then threw both stones over the railing into the dark sea.

For a moment he looked up at the stars then slowly returned to the cabin.

"Poor darling," said his wife. "I know how you must feel. But don't be downhearted. I'm certain the trip's done you a world of good. Besides we can always come back and try again next year."

Stockman's face lit up. "That's true," he said. "Of course we can. By golly, next year we'll come back and stage an all-Ionian island contest. If the Scherians don't want to play ball they can damn well stay out."

"They'll come in," said his wife confidently. She raised her glass. "Here's to perfection."

"To perfection," echoed Stockman. He drained his glass, went over, kissed his wife on the cheek, took her arm in his and went gaily into dinner.

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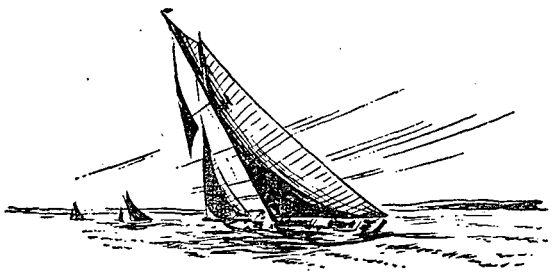

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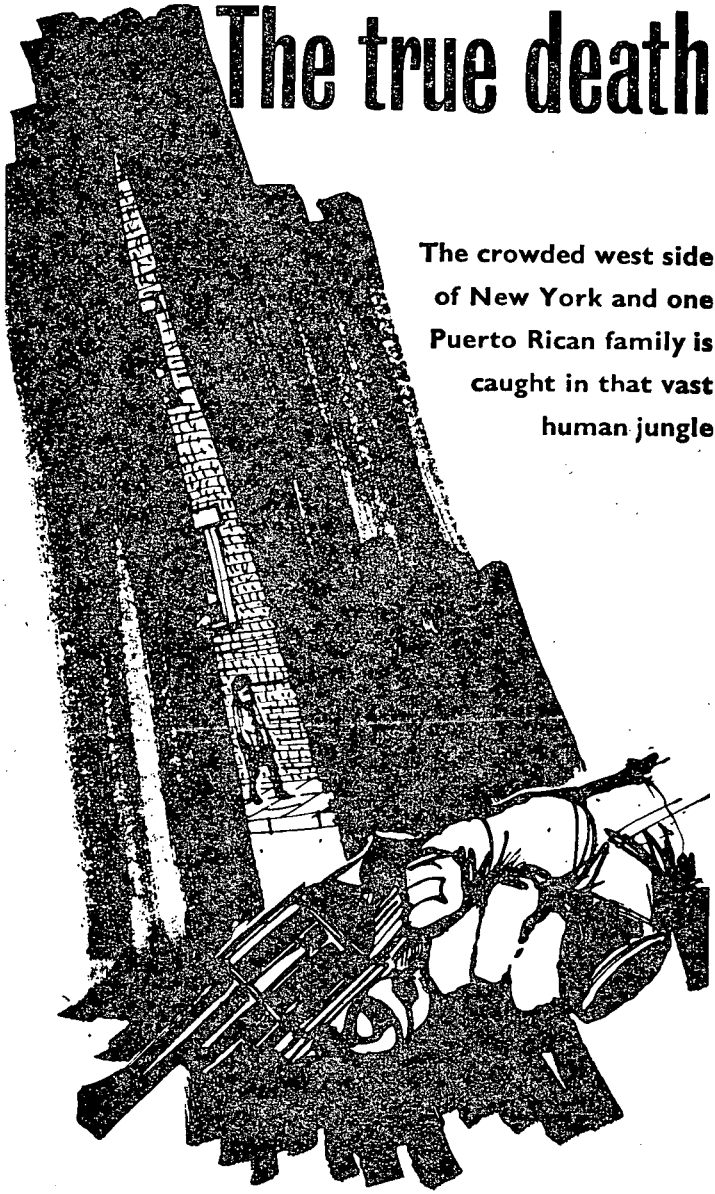
The true death



The crowded west side of New York and one Puerto Rican family is caught in that vast human jungle

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# of Juanito Rodriguez

by LEIGH BRACKETT

IT was dark in the room. The windows were shut and the blinds drawn, although it was bright morning outside and already warm. On one wall, on a small shelf, a votive candle flickered beneath a small, brightly-coloured image of the Blessed Virgin with the Child in her arms.

Luisa put the bowls of cereal on the table, setting them down as quietly as possible. Then she went to help Tina do up her buttons and comb her hair. Both the girls wore dresses of rusty black, streaked and wrinkled from Luisa's inexpert washings. Their black cotton stockings had lumpy ridges in them where Luisa had mended them, sewing up the holes because she did not know how to darn them.

The girls sat down at the table and began to eat. They did not talk, and they kept their eyes fixed on their bowls. Once or twice Luisa stole a sidelong glance at Madre, hoping that perhaps today it would be different, perhaps today the real Madre would have returned. But the strange woman sat in the chair, dressed all in black with the black shawl over her head and her eyes black and burning in her still face, staring at something Luisa could not see. Luisa bent her head again and finished her cereal.

When she got up from the table she was still hungry. She seemed to be always hungry these days. The food she cooked was not very good, no matter how hard she tried. She wished Madre would cook again. She wished Madre would speak to them, and let them take off these black things that were so ugly and hot. She yearned for the pink and blue and yellow dresses they used to wear, fresh and smooth from Madre's iron. These dresses hung on the peg in the alcove that belonged to her and Tina, but she dared not mention them or even look at them. Tina had done that, and Madre had come suddenly out of her stillness crying, "Your brother is dead no more than three weeks and already you are through with mourning, you have forgotten him." Luisa had felt then that her mother hated them.

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She cleaned up the dishes, standing on tiptoe to reach into the sink. Then she kissed Madre dutifully on the cheek. She wanted to cry and throw her arms around her, but she had tried that, and that too was an experience she did not wish to repeat. Madre continued to stare straight ahead of her while Tina in her turn kissed the pale flesh that looked so cold but felt so hot to the lips. The children picked up their books and went out, closing the door very quietly behind them. They walked sedately down the grimy steps of the tenement and out into the sunshine.

All the way along the block, where the curtained windows faced them, they went slowly with their heads bowed. As soon as they turned the corner they joined hands and began to run and skip. In a moment they were laughing.

In the close, dark room, Josefina Rodriguez rose and locked the door.

An old tin trunk stood in a corner. Josefina opened it and dug down through the packed layers of her life—the few documents, the pictures, the keepsakes, the christening dress that had served all four of her children, the wedding dress she had brought with her from Puerto Rico. The mourning she had worn for Juan had been in this trunk also. Now she wore it again for Juanito.

On the bottom of the trunk, beneath the wedding dress, she felt the hard bone grip of the revolver and lifted it out. It was heavy, with a very long barrel. It took both of her strong hands to hold it steady. Long ago a friend had left the revolver with Juan and had never come back for it. Juan used to keep it clean. Now there were flecks of rust and places where dirt and oil had caked together and turned black. But it was still loaded.

She carried it to the window and carefully opened up a torn place in the blind. The hole was large enough for her to see through, above the barrel of the gun. She stood, holding the gun in her two hands, looking through the bright hole.

Children were passing on their way to the school. Many children, of many sizes and colours. Her view of the street that ran immediately below was restricted by the blind, but she had a clear view of the opposite sidewalk. She watched the children. After a while a boy came. He was perhaps ten years old, Luisa's age, or perhaps eleven. He was a thin, pale boy with very light hair. His hair shone yellow in the sunlight. Josefina moved the gun so that she was looking at the bright hair through the notch on the rear sight.

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"Your father," she said to the boy, "has murdered my son. Why should your father have a son when I have none?"

She asked this same question of him every day. She swung the pistol barrel slowly, following the boy as he walked.

"Not today," she said to the boy. "You are clever, there are always too many others around you, and you know it is too far for me. Go to school. Eat and drink. Play in the sun. There is time."

The boy walked almost as though he heard her, keeping close to the group, his head turning constantly from side to side.

Josefina smiled. *I know why you do that,* she thought. *I see them too, standing in that doorway, sitting on those steps, watching you. They were Juanito's good friends. They saw your father kill him. They know how it was. They know you. But I am the one you should fear, baker's son with the thin shoulders, baker's son with the white hair . . .*

She could not see him any longer.

She put the pistol away and then she stood beside the trunk, just standing, doing nothing.

Someone knocked on the door. "Josefina—"

It was Carlos, who wanted to marry her. She was a widow with four children and two of them grown, but she was not old yet and much of her beauty remained. A kind man with gentle hands, a good worker, and he wanted to marry her.

"Go away," she said.

"Please, Josefina. Let me in. I have brought food."

"Go away."

She heard him sigh, and put the heavy sack down outside the door. But he did not go.

He spoke again, in a way she had never heard before. "How long is it to be like this?"

"Always," she said. "I have told you."

"Because of Juanito, even though he is gone."

"I have told you."

"You have told me," Carlos said. "Now tell me something else. Why was it that Juanito hated me? Why did he tell you not to marry me?"

"Because you . . ."

"Because *lies.* He lied to you, but he knew that he could not lie to me."

"Go away!" she cried. "Go, go. Do not ever come back."

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"You are a foolish woman, Josefina," said Carlos softly, sorrowfully. And now she heard him go.

She tried not to listen. Instead, from the dark places inside her she brought forth the sound of Juanito's voice, the loved, remembered sound, telling her . . .

She felt weak, with a hollow weakness. She was not conscious of hunger, but since there had been a mention of food she realised she could not remember when she had eaten. She would not touch the food Carlos had brought. In the tiny, hot kitchen she found bread and part of a bottle of wine. She devoured them with the fierce simplicity of an animal and, when she was through, she went to the closed door of the room that had been Juanito's. She herself slept in the bed in the one big room, and the two girls shared the bed in the alcove, but Juanito had had a room of his own and it was still his, just as he had left it.

She went inside.

That afternoon she watched the baker's boy, the thin German boy, walking on his way home, his head filling the sights of the rusty gun. Once he lifted his head and she saw his face framed in the notch, with the post of the front sight between his eyes. For a moment it was almost as though he were looking at her through the hole in the blind, but she knew that was impossible; and anyway he did not know her. He might not even know that Juanito had had a mother.

How ugly he is, she thought. *So thin and pale. Ugly German boy, why should you live when my beautiful brown Juanito had to die?*

She put the pistol back into the trunk before the girls came . . .

When they came, their sister Consuelo was with them. Consuelo was eighteen, two years older than Juanito, and she was married. She walked through the door with a child circled in each arm, and then suddenly she stopped and turned them round and told them to go outside and play.

"But Madre does not wish us to play."

"Go," said Consuelo, and shut the door behind them. Their feet went rattling down the stairs. Consuelo turned on her mother.

"What are you doing to those little ones?"

"They are mourning their brother." Josefina's eyes burnt on Consuelo's white skirt, her bright blouse. "You are not welcome here."

"Was I ever, after he came? I don't care now, but those

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two . . . I went to the school to see them. They are thin and dirty." Josefina began to speak, but Consuelo's voice rose louder. "You should take care of them, they are yours to care for, just as much as he was."

Josefina moved towards her, and all at once Consuelo's voice became quiet and her eyes held such anger that Josefina was startled.

"You throw us all away," said Consuelo. "We are only girls. How could we compare with our brother?"

"He was a man. I loved you, but a boy is different—a son. He was all the man I had after your father died." Josefina was trembling. "Always you were jealous, always you . . ."

"He laughed at you," said Consuelo cruelly. "He could tell you anything and you believed it." She raised her hand quickly and struck aside the blow that was aimed for her face. "Not any more, Mother. And do not talk to me of love, not when I see what you do to those poor babies."

Josefina stood with the black shawl tight around her where her straining fingers pulled it. "Four weeks ago your brother was murdered, murdered . . ." She repeated it three times. "And no-one cares. The police don't care, he is only another Puerto Rican, a dirty spik. What do they care? Let him die —they will do nothing. His murderer walks free. And you, you shed no tears, you have no grief for your brother, your father's son."

"I have no grief," said Consuelo. "No more than the little ones, who are too small to pretend. Juanito left no grief behind him except yours." She looked at her mother, and then she went to the alcove and lifted down the small dresses that hung there, faded pink and blue and yellow. "I will take the girls home with me," she said, and went out.

Josefina did not try to stop her.

That night she went to sleep on her knees in Juanito's room, her body fallen forwards across the bed.

The next morning, with the girls gone, she could take up her post by the torn blind much earlier. While she waited, she watched the fronts of the dingy tenements across the way where the slim dark boys lounged and smoked and talked together—Juanito's friends. She knew about them, because he had told her. They had all come to the funeral dressed in their best clothes, and they had spoken to her and said how evil it was that Juanito's death should go unpunished. Good boys,

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like Juanito, and if sometimes they were in trouble it was the fault of this city, this huge, dirty, noisy city that seared you with heat and stabbed you with cold and drowned you with ugliness and rolled on over you as uncaring as time. She remembered Puerto Rico with an aching nostalgia. She had been young there, and poor, and happy. She was still poor, but now neither young nor happy, and this city had taken from her more than it would ever give . . .

The boy came walking. She watched till he was gone, her finger unsteady on the trigger.

At a quarter to twelve, Father Chavez knocked and she opened the door.

He looked around the room, and sighed, and shook his head. He was a young priest, with a round, smooth face untouched by sorrow.

"You still do not come to Mass, Mrs. Rodriguez."

"No, Father."

"Why not?"

She did not answer.

"Is it because you feel that God has deserted you?"

"No, Father."

"Is it then, that you have deserted God?"

Her face was closed against him, as tightly closed as this breathless room. He put out his hand towards her.

"Please, I wish to help you. Let me help you."

"My boy is murdered," she said. "Can you help that, Father? Do you wish to help?"

Father Chavez let his hands fall to his side. He said very carefully, as he had said before, "Mr. Hoffman did not *murder* your son. He acted in defence of his own life and property, and even then he did not intend to kill the boy, it was an accident that he fell. Your son . . ."

"Not even you, Father. No. Not even you may say those things." She stood by the door. "You ask why I do not come to Mass. That is why, because of what you believe about Juanito."

"I will tell you again," he said, "that hatred is a sin, that you are endangering your immortal soul."

She stood by the door, implacable.

"I will not give up, Mrs. Rodriguez. I will come again tomorrow."

He moved past her and then turned, looking deeply into her eyes. "And I will ask you to wonder why it was that you would never look for yourself to see what your son was

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doing. Was it because you truly believed everything he said to you, or was it because you were afraid of what you would find?"

"You are like all the rest," she whispered, "in spite of your cloth. I will never come to Mass."

She closed the door behind him and stood against it, feeling lost and cut off, drowning in a dark sea. "God forgive me. God forgive me, but he does not understand." Suddenly she flung herself before the Madonna, in an agony of need. "You know! You know what it is to lose a son."

At three o'clock she stood at the window, holding the pistol, waiting.

Presently the children came, but the baker's boy was not with them. She waited longer, and still he did not come. She became nervous and excited, pressing closer to the hole in the blind, trying to see along the street. Perhaps he had been kept late at the school? Or perhaps he had found another way to go to and from his home? Perhaps his father had gone away with him and she would never see him again?

But after a time, the boy came into sight.

Tears of relief stung Josefina's eyes. The boy came closer, walking quickly with his head down, moving it from side to side as he always did. But this time he was all alone.

The slender dark young men lounged in the doorways and sat upon the steps, watching the son of Juanito's killer go by.

The boy's feet went more and more quickly, and then they began to hesitate as the young men moved, so casually that at first Josefina was not sure they were moving at all.

But they moved. They drifted gently towards the boy.

The boy stopped. He looked from left to right and back again along the hot street with the tenements baking in the sun. Then he ran straight towards the building where Josefina stood watching. He had seen the alley that opened beside it and he was going there, hoping for escape. Only there was no escape that way. None at all.

Josefina hid the long pistol under the end of her shawl. She opened the door and went out of the dark room, into the hall and down the stairs and then along the shadowy, sweat-and-spice-smelling corridor below to the back door, hurrying...

The boy was there when she went out. He had come through the alleyway and found that there was nothing at the end of it but this oblong space with the walls of hot

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brick going up high on all sides, and the corners deep with rubbish, and the old paving stones black with grime, and stinking. He had stopped at the far end of this space, where the alley came into it. He stared around it, and he stared back along the alley, his mouth open, his eyes wide and wild.

Josefina stood by the door, the long pistol in her hand underneath the shawl.

The boy saw her. He whimpered, and a change came over his face. He ran towards her.

She watched him running with his arms outstretched.

His arms went tight around her and his face pressed into her body. He began to cry against her body.

She looked down at him and thought, *The gun is heavy but it will not be necessary to lift it far.*

Juanito's friends came towards her out of the alley.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Rodriguez."

"I see you have caught him, Mrs. Rodriguez."

"That is good. Mrs. Rodriguez. We will teach this wasp child and his father that they cannot kill us so easily."

"Let us have him, Mrs. Rodriguez."

She looked at their faces in the hot shadow cast by the walls.

"Let us have him, Mrs. Rodriguez. He will pay for Juanito."

And these are the good boys, she thought, *Juanito's friends.*

"But your faces," she said to them aloud, "are the faces of wolves."

The child's arms were tight round her. He buried his face against her so that he should not see them coming, the six young, grown men against his single smallness.

"No," she said. "Wait."

They looked at her in astonishment. "Wait? Why?"

"The boy did not kill Juanito. It was his father."

I say this? she thought. *I who have killed this child every day in my mind since Juanito was buried?*

Their faces fascinated her. She saw them looming towards her, wavering strangely in the shadow. Had her own looked like these?

"But we do not have the father, Mrs. Rodriguez," said the faces, sneering, smiling. "We have only the son."

One of them reached out his hands for the boy.

"No," she said. "Let him alone. He is only a child, and frightened."

They stopped smiling. "Get out of the way, you old fool," one of them said, and stepped forward.

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The long pistol was suddenly free of the shawl. It pointed towards them. Josefina saw it, with a kind of remote surprise, pointing at them steadily. It did not feel heavy at all.

The eager one stopped. He stared into the round, black, rust-flecked hole as into the eye of death. They all stared, their mouths coming open.

"Who held the knife," she said, "on the night Juanito died?"

The hot air hummed with little noises and the great silence of oncoming truth.

They began to mock her. "Should we tell you that, Mrs. Rodriguez? No, why should we tell you that? Did Juanito ever tell you of the knife, Mrs. Rodriguez? Did Juanito ever tell you anything?"

They laughed. And then one of the young men humped his back suddenly like an angry cat and screamed at her.

"You stupid woman! You silly old woman!"

"Go," she said. Her voice sounded strange in her ears. *The voice of a dead woman,* she thought. *A dead woman I stand here, a dead woman I speak. And now truly I have lost my son.*

"Go quickly," she said. The black, rusty eye of the pistol peered from one to the other.

Oh, truly and for ever I have lost him.

They began to move back. When they were at the other end of the court they made obscenities, but she only stood and watched them, a tall woman in black with a boy clinging round her waist.

In a moment she said to the boy, "They are gone."

He did not understand her words, but he knew what she was saying. He lifted his head. She touched it with one hand. She smiled at him, but her eyes were crying. He took his arms from around her waist, and he said, "Thank you," because he did not know what else to say. It disturbed him that she was crying. He was still very much afraid.

He realised that he would have to go out on to the street again. He took hold of her hand. "Please, will you walk home with me?"

Slowly, in halting English, she answered, "In a moment I will walk with you, even as far as the church. In a moment..."

She sank to her knees and he continued to hold her hand, wondering, trying to comfort her, as she wept with her face pressed hard against his chest.

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A Drop of the CRATHUR

by John D. Sheridan

THERE are few things so expendable as a bottle of whiskey, for it looks inexhaustible, and so invites its own destruction. You could have a bottle of sherry in the house for a full month and scarcely know it was there, but if you want to live for any length of time with a bottle of whiskey you will have to do something desperate—like leaving it in the tool shed and covering it with sods of turf.

I am speaking, of course, of Irish whiskey, for it was we who invented the stuff, and christened it *uisce beata*, the water of life. I have nothing against Scotch, which is a good thing to take to when you are trying to wean yourself off strong drink, and not nearly as habit-forming as peppermint lozenges, but it is not a patch on the real thing; and it was surely a drop of the crathur that Muiris Phaidi Mhoir was thinking of when he said that it went down his throat like a torchlight procession.

Whiskey (that is, Irish whiskey) is (*a*) a great man for the common cold, and (*b*) a fairly reliable way of inducing one. This is why it is dangerous to have a bottle of it lying about the house. You won't know a day's health until you finish it; and even then you may have a relapse. The very sight of a bottle of whiskey is enough to bring on a touch of catarrh or bronchitis—a wheeziness in the tubes, a hint of phlegm in the throat, some stuffiness in the sinuses; and even if you have no symptoms you try a cough or two and find that you have a cold coming on.

So you decide to put a dinge in the bottle, and without any qualms of conscience. For this is not the sort of drinking that goes on in public houses. It is treating yourself, not

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treating your neighbours. It is diagnosis and prescription. It is thinking of your wife and children. It is a charity that begins and ends at home. It is minding number one and not flying in God's face, for many a man gets his end from not taking enough of the right stuff at the right time and from miserly trucking with aspirin tablets and hot lemon drinks.

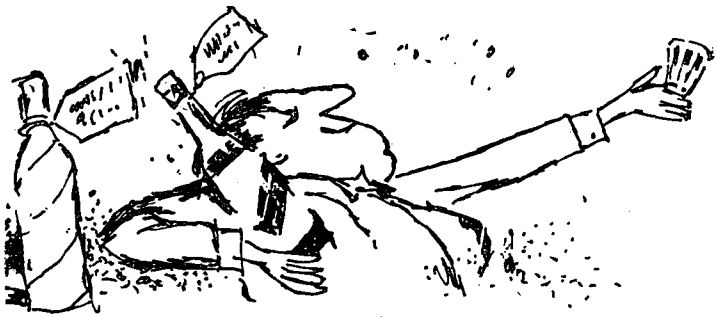
A bottle of whiskey bought and paid for is one thing; a bottle acquired as a present, bribe, or prize is another. The first is ten glasses, or roughly four times as many shillings; the second is beyond all price and gauging.

If you want to get a nomination for the Bank, win over a voter, or soften up a prospective father-in-law, there is nothing to touch a bottle of whiskey. It is also useful in campaigns to extend the golf pavilion, build a parish hall, add a new wing to the hospital, or clear off the overdraft on the Badminton Club; and the success of a Sale of Work is practically assured if you have a pretty ticket-seller (and she need not be too pretty) roaming round the hall with a full bottle of whiskey under her arm.

Organisers of raffles should remember this when they are drawing up their lists of prizes, but they seldom do. They announce the main attraction (a Fortnight in Bermuda, a Motor Scooter, or a Televison Set) in heavy black type, and then give subdued billing to such minutiae as a Doll's House, a Set of Billiard Balls, or Fifty Day-Old Chicks.

I speak with some feeling on this matter, for I once came fifth out of the drum and was confronted with a purple tea cosy. This was described in the bill of lading as a Consolation Prize, but I didn't find it very consoling.

But I was luckier on another occasion—I won a bottle of



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whiskey. It wasn't before its time, for it must have cost me fifty pounds over the years, but I was more than content. I had missed the major prize, admittedly (a Two-Year-Old Bullock), but I had also missed a Permanent Wave, a Stone of Sugar, and a Dachshund pup.

My whiskey was delivered to me later by one of the committee men: three days and two bottles of whiskey later, to be precise. And he had a harrowing tale to tell when he brought it.

"I took it home with me on the night of the draw," he said, "meaning to bring it round to you the following day. But Paddy and Joe called that night to arrange a fourball, and what could I do?"

I saw his point at once. What could he do?

"I bought a replacement the next day," he went on, "and who should call that very evening but the cousin from Ballybay. Well, you know how it is. You can't have a full bottle of whiskey on the sideboard and never ask a man if he has a mouth on him.

"So this is the third bottle."

I set the third bottle on the sideboard and gave the committee man a cigarette. He looked at me, and I looked at him, and then we both looked at the bottle of whiskey. It seemed as big as a lighthouse. So there was only one thing to do. There was only one thing to do, and I did it.

When I was replenishing his glass for the third time he said he was glad I hadn't won the Permanent Wave. After all the money I had cost him I thought that was very big of him.

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Seeds of Time

He was so angry he did not see the trap being baited

YOUNG Foster ran down the quadrangle, through the cloisters and then slap into a brick wall. Wallop. Just like that.

He bashed his head, spilt a lot of blood, knocked himself out and was carted off to the sanatorium where he stayed, pretty dizzy, I suppose, for the best part of a week.

This is the vividest memory of all my schooldays because I was one of the chaps who caused the trouble. It was 12.15 p.m., end of morning lessons, and in those days the fashionable rag was to belt the man ahead of you—preferably someone who was wandering out of a class alone—smartly across the backside and cry, "I'm after you!"

The man thus struck ran like a stag until he could find some other person similarly placed, whom he could strike in turn. And so on. It seemed to us wildly funny and the chase led, by unwritten law, to any latrine, an agreed sanctuary.

It was I who hit Foster across his rump and he set off at speed clearly knowing what it was all about, and enjoying the rag. But he ran straight into the wall, and that was the start of it. I felt pretty guilty because of the accident, though there was no sort of bullying involved. He was quite good at games and might easily have got clear away. I didn't know him at all well although he was in my own form and my own house. Even so, conscience nagged at me and I went down to the sanatorium. It was the beginning of a year-long friendship.

He was a very odd fellow, small and shy, with big dark eyes and the kind of nose that earned him the nickname, Beaky.

The first time I really noticed anything strange about him

by YOUNGMAN CARTER

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was during an English lesson under old Mothballs, not a natural schoolmaster but a dull dog who got by with uninspired efficiency. The subject was John Fairclough, the poet, a minor light of the late eighteenth century, but one of our more illustrious old boys. Indeed, there is a Fairclough Memorial Fountain in the quad which had just been cleaned and refurbished, for this was his bi-centenary year.

Mothballs was talking about the Fairclough biography, reissued and re-edited for the celebration. It is the standard work, by a man called Ramsden, also a son of the school, a contemporary of the poet's. The old man was rambling along, almost intoning his remarks, when he perceived that Foster was asleep. Always a fine shot with a piece of chalk he caught the boy right on the bridge of his nose.

There was some applause for the feat, which he followed up by remarking, "Perhaps, Foster, you would care to give us some of your personal impressions of Fairclough, a few nuts from your squirrel's hoard of information? Some private morsel already in store, since you are clearly not in need of anything which can be gained by paying attention."

Foster was rubbing his nose, which was apparently pretty painful. Everyone was laughing at him; he was hurt and very angry. He stood up.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I can. Fairclough had ginger hair and a stammer. His eyes used to water a lot, particularly when he was being ragged. And . . . and he was a dirty little sneak when he had half the chance. He sneaked on Ramsden once for breaking bounds and got him a birching."

Old Mothballs was taken out of his stride by this but he came back acidly. Sarcasm was his speciality.

"Indeed, Foster? How remarkable then that Ramsden never mentions this incident, though he gives us a wealth of other information about their schooldays—in this very classroom, my boy, possibly just where you are now idling—and when he speaks of Fairclough's hair he says it was golden as a cornfield."

Foster was so angry that he did not see the trap being baited. He went on, still rubbing his nose, "Fairclough sat in the front, sir, because he was jolly short-sighted. Not in my seat, sir, but where Forsdyke is sitting now. Ramsden sat at the back with the rest of the bullies. He wasn't a friend of Fairclough's at all. He only said that later, years afterwards, when he wanted to make himself out to be important. He was just a common toady. Even the masters didn't like him."

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By now Foster had made rather an effect: he spoke as if it had been only the term before and he really did know what he was talking about.

Even Mothballs paused before he remarked, "But this is fascinating. I never credited you with possessing either erudition or imagination. Perhaps you can enlighten us all about the incident of the flying pork pie? Was there injustice in those days, Foster?"

He was referring to the one good piece of gossip in the schooldays chapter, a passage which describes how the poet was accused of throwing a pork pie through the Headmaster's dining-room window thereby disrupting the meal which was in progress (for it struck an open soup tureen) and bringing down a fearful vengeance on the young poet, who had always protested his innocence.

"Oh, he did it all right," said Foster. "But it was a mistake. He was sweet on the Head's daughter, Dorothea. He was trying to chuck it up into her bedroom, just above. He was always a rotten shot, being so boss-eyed."

We were all listening now. Mothballs was in some danger of losing control of things. Finally he said, "And how are you so certain of all this, Master Foster? Were you a spectral visitor at the scene? Speak up, boy."

Foster lost his nerve. His face went from red to white and he shook himself, a twitch as if he were a wet dog.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said at last. "I made it all up. It was a . . . a sort of daydream I had. I beg your pardon."

He sat down, or rather he crumpled up as if he'd been winded.

"In that case you will confine your dreaming to the proper place in future. You will also write out Ramsden's excellent chapter, *Our Happiest Days*, in a fair copperplate hand and bring it to me by Wednesday morning. Without fail. It should cure you of the modern tendency to sneer and to denigrate the heroes of old."

That was the end of the incident. It might have been worse, I decided, if poor Foster had not looked so ill at the end. Most of us thought he was going to faint. I gave him a hand with his impot, for we were now regular friends and whilst we sat at it in the dayroom, I asked him what on earth had come over him.

"I don't know," he said. "He riled me, hitting me on the nose like that. I ought to have shut up about all that tripe of Ramsden's. He was a greasy swine, anyhow."

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"How on earth do you know?" I said. "Been swotting it up in some other book?"

"No," he said. "I'm not a swot. It's just that I... oh, forget it. I'll tell you some other time. I promise." Then he turned to his lines and muttered, "Carroty-headed little stinker."

I tried again but he just clammed up and we finished the job in silence.

The second odd thing happened on a Tuesday in June. I remember it very well because it was the eve of Derby Day, and the maths master had been encouraging us to take an interest in simple arithmetic by calculating odds and running an imaginary book in class. He was one of those "with-it" types, very rare in those days.

Just before afternoon school, Foster dashed up to me in the changing room where I was oiling a bat. He was very excited.

"I say," he whispered. "Do you have any money you can lay your hands on? I've just remembered... that is, it's just occurred to me... we can do ourselves proud. Coronach's the name for tomorrow. We can't go wrong."

Now, even at that tender age, I had heard that once before and pocket money was precious. But Foster was so excited and so persuasive that he whisked my objections away. In all, we scraped five pounds together, and in the late afternoon we found old Pudney, the groundsman and cricket pro, at the nets. He was our strictly illegal bookie, though it was an open secret, for the masters also used him freely.

We won twenty-five pounds, a great fortune.

As we were counting our hoard for the sixth time behind the pavilion—it was towards teatime on the Saturday evening and the first eleven were dragging out their game for a draw—I raised the matter which had been bothering me for three days.

"Look here, Foster," I said. "When you first thought of this effort of ours you said, 'I've just remembered,' about Coronach. Then you backed out of it and said, 'It's just occurred to me,' as if someone had given you a tip out of the air or something. Now you jolly well own up and tell me how you knew."

He looked away from me and began to mumble.

"It was just a hunch. I didn't really know. Honestly, I simply guessed it." He brightened. "But it came off, didn't it?"

"Bosh," I said. "You knew about it somehow and you

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won't admit it. I think it's something to do with that bang on the head you got when you ran into the wall. I think you see visions and you just won't own up to it. Look, if you do, why don't we go into partnership on bets and things and become millionaires? You might even be able to see what things to bone up on for the exams."

He shook his head. "No, old boy," he said. "It isn't a bit like that. That bang on the head was only a silly mistake. I... I thought I could ... well, never mind what I thought. I forgot something, if you must know."

He shut up for a bit as if he'd been about to confide in me but had thought better of it, but then went on, rather red in the face. "Look, about this twenty-five quid. I'd rather you had it. None of it really belongs to me and you could get a motor bike for that if your old man would stand for it. You keep it. I can't use it, anyway. Pity to waste it. Please hang on to it—well, at least to the end of term. You'll see what I mean then."

I told him bosh and rubbish, but he was so solemn and so insistent that I agreed to hold our loot until the holidays when we'd have our share-out whether he liked it or not.

In a way, a rather miserable way, it was just as well. About three weeks before the end of term Foster killed himself. He blew himself up one afternoon in one of the science labs, where he had no business anyhow, for it was a half holiday and science wasn't his subject. There was one hell of an explosion, all the electric circuits in the school went haywire, there was a hole in the wall of the physics lab you could have driven a cart through, a considerable fire and a mess which stank the place out for days.

But no Foster. Not a rag nor a bone, except for what they thought might have been his cap, but could just as well have been anyone's from the state it was in. We only knew it was Foster because a cleaner actually saw him there mucking about with some wires.

Well, of course there was the most awful row you can imagine. He had an old uncle with whom he lived, who naturally came roaring down from Northumberland where he was supposed to own a great castle (sometimes it was a haunted grange, according to rumour) together with dozens of officials and policemen and journalists. Nothing came of it, although uncle and his friends poked about in the remains for weeks, even after the school broke up. No-one ever discovered what Foster had been doing and no trace of him was ever

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found. Death by misadventure, they said, and added a lot of tripe about adequate precautions being taken with dangerous equipment.

I was more cut up about it than anyone—certainly more than his uncle who seemed, I thought, curious and excited rather than sad, as any decent guardian ought to have been. He ransacked Foster's locker and took all his kit away, even his schoolbooks, which weren't his anyhow.

This matter-of-fact, clinical attitude made me so angry and so sad that I moped all through the summer holidays and never told anyone about the one bit of Foster that remained, apart from his share of the twenty-five pounds.

This was his folio, a sort of stout cardboard file with flaps which you tied with black tapes and kept exercise paper and notebooks and letters in. We all had one, for they were issued to us, but Foster had managed to wangle two.

The second one was what he called his secret file and he never showed it to anyone, not even to me.

The day after the explosion I found it right at the back of my own locker and I knew he must have put it there himself just before the accident. I guarded my secret at first with a miserable resentment against fate, which had removed my friend so suddenly; then, as a sentimental relic of my school-days.

Finally, of course, I forgot all about it.

Foster, having disappeared or disintegrated or been blown to atoms, lived on only as a nine days' wonder to be discussed at Old Boys' gatherings, along with Watson's stupendous six over the chapel right into the quad, Entwhistle's try against Charterhouse and Fat Potter getting six of the best in the dining hall for amateur ventriloquism.

It was at one of these gatherings, years after, that the subject inevitably arose again. Old Boys' Day was wet that year and we gathered gloomily in the Big School after lunch for there was no cricket to watch. In its place was an exhibition of old prints and maps of the school going back over four hundred years.

The man standing next to me said, "That's odd. Do you remember poor old Beaky Foster running into the wall of the cloisters and nearly braining himself?"

I agreed that I did and asked what was odd about it. "Look at this map," said the man. "Drawn in 1790, before the library was built. If Foster had been dashing down the quad

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then, he'd have been able to turn sharp left and would have had a clear run as far as the Head's yard. I always thought he was odd even before that bang on the head. Never quite with it, you know. Remember that day he lectured Mothballs about Fairclough's red hair?"

The whole thing came back to me so vividly that I felt quite sick with a sudden surge of forgotten emotion. When I got home I rummaged around for Foster's secret folio, which I found after a long search at the back of a drawer full of theatre programmes. It must have been thirty years since I had last turned over the contents.

There is a photograph, cut out of a rugger group, of John Pilchard, who, I am very much afraid, may be our next Prime Minister but one, and a complete essay—rather a good one—in a round schoolboy hand, a set piece for prep, signed by the late Charles Winters the dramatist, which must be quite valuable now. Then there are three separate signatures, pinned together—of Sir James Purdee the atomic wizard, who is the biggest name in the business today; and an amateurish snap of Wagstaff the composer, aged about fourteen, holding a fiddle. An old-fashioned fountain pen has a label *Lauderdale's Pen, which he gave me when it went wrong*, and this is almost too valuable a trophy to keep these days, when every scrap connected with that immortal hero is a collector's item.

There is a sketch of an airplane, remarkably modern, signed and dated 1926, by Bradley, who is the greatest of living designers but showed no sign of talent at school; and finally a whole collection of signatures and bits of writing, together with a button and a very scruffy school tie, marked as belonging to Adam Makepeace, aged thirteen, Lower IVB, whom I don't remember and have never heard of since. There is nothing, I regret to say, of my own.

There were about seven hundred of us there in 1926, and out of those boys, Foster had collected souvenirs of our six famous men, and with one exception, nothing else.

You must admit that wherever he came from or wherever he went to, there was something very odd about Foster. Odd, you know, because he wasn't weird at all—just an ordinary rather nice, shy chap, who always seemed on the verge of confiding something but never did.

I often had the feeling he might turn up again, though I don't see how. In the meantime I watch the papers for news of Adam Makepeace, and I advise you all to do the same.

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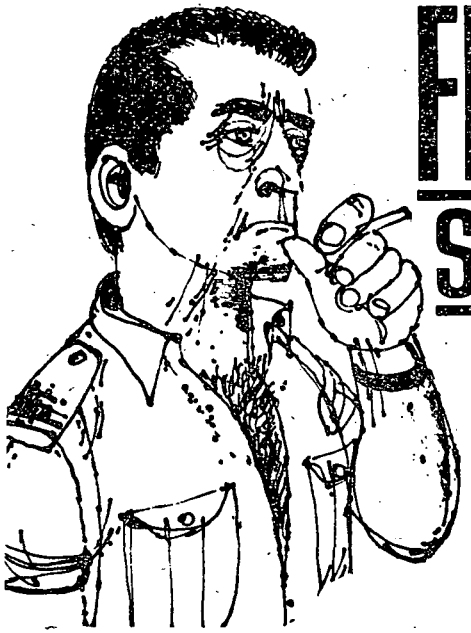

FIRING SQUAD

by JOSEPH KESSEL

I met him on a summer's day in 1943 on the airfield at Marrakesh.

I had arrived from Algiers in a French aircraft, and had landed there to leave for England in an American bomber. The preparations for departure took a long time. But the wait did not bore me. The marvellous sky, the peaks of the Atlas mountains, the movements of the Moroccan workmen, a sense of lightness, and leisure, all contributed to deprive time of its value and to hold thought in suspense.

Suddenly, I was no longer seeing the sky and the mountains and my reverie was cut short. Two men—a commandant and a captain—joined the little group who were to leave in the Flying Fortress. They each had the sort of appearance which was bound to attract the most *distrait* and wandering mind.

They were both tall and broad, and had the powerful necks, massive shoulders and deep chests of heavy athletes. They held their heads proudly and defiantly high and turned unblinkingly to the heat of the sun faces that were still young but marked, moulded and, as one might say, signed by their epic lives. In the lines of their faces and in their expressions,

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Behind each Joseph Kessel story are years of meetings with people who are larger than life and live in defiance of their destiny.

there were the ruggedness and the poetry of the soldier, the bandit, the corsair and the inspired adventurer.

They wore no decorations on their khaki shirts, only the insignia of Free France.

The commandant, with the brow and mane of a bison, had lost his right arm. The amputation was recent and a black stain showed through the bandages which enveloped the stump just below the shoulder. His companion walked with the help of a stick.

I cannot remember how the conversation began. But I do remember that, from the very first words spoken, there was that tone of confidence and comradeship which is more important even than the words. I was fascinated by these two men. They had read three or four of my books and had a liking for some of my heroes, without realising that they themselves wholly surpassed the characters I had been able to imagine and describe in the intensity of their forcefulness and the power of their high destiny.

Huge flies were settling on the dark, sticky fluid emanating from the commandant's wound. When the swarm became too greedy, he shook his stump like a broken aileron.

"Aren't you afraid of infection?" I asked him.

"That's all nonsense," he said in his hoarse, rumbling voice. "There are hospitals in London, aren't there?"

"He's got a hide like an elephant," the captain muttered. "He's already recovered from seventeen wounds."

"That's right," the commandant allowed. "At least, if you only count those inflicted on me by humans."

"Oh, of course. If it's a question of horns, claws and teeth, we're all square," his companion said.

We were suddenly deafened by the thunder of the four engines. The travellers hauled themselves on the bomber.

Except in the crew's compartment, there were no seats. Instead, there were suitcases, bedding-rolls, tin trunks and valises. You could sit where you liked and next to whom you pleased. The conversation we had begun on the airfield continued during the flight.

The flight lasted eight hours and I was able to learn a good deal about my new friends by getting them to talk about each other.

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They had known each other extremely well for a long time, and each was aware of the strength and sincerity of the other. They had both spent the most important part of their lives in Equatorial Africa. Character and temperament, deprived of the amenities, conventions, artificialities and façades of civilisation, no doubt became nakedly apparent.

They came from different backgrounds. The commandant was a schoolmaster. The captain—an engineer from a well known college—had gone to Africa as an employee of a public works' company. But they both had a passion for the jungle, the wilds, the primitive tribes, daring expeditions and, above all, the more dangerous forms of hunting. They travelled continually about the country, and were known both to whites and blacks as the best shots in those immense territories.

The engineer had soon left his employment to become a gold prospector, a carrier, a planter, and a slayer of buffaloes, lions and elephants. The restrictions on big-game shooting had no weight with him. He poached skins and ivory happily. The schoolmaster did the same.

In 1939, they were called up in Africa. The defeat came too quickly for them to have been able to take any part in the fighting in France. The news of the armistice left them stunned, dazed and incredulous. But then followed De Gaulle's appeal of 18 June, 1940, for continued French resistance. They were not the men to accept defeat or bow to the yoke. They could breathe again. Both Chad and the Congo rallied to the unknown general who had spoken from London. The two hunters were the first volunteers. An army was being formed. They were sent out into the wilds to recruit.

The conversation had reached this point when the bomber began to lose height as we approached the English coast. We could already see its outline in the warm mist of evening.

"The recruiting presented no problems," one of my companions (I don't remember which of them) said. "You went from village to village with your native soldiers. You looked for robust negroes, and the Saras, for instance, are magnificent chaps, almost giants. You selected the finest. And to make sure you got them all safely back, you attached them in file with slip-knots round their necks. If one of them got out of line he strangled the others."

"But . . ." I protested.

The two officers exchanged an amused and indulgent glance. The commandant waved his stump and said, "Yes, I know.

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The law. The liberty of the subject. But it was for law and liberty we were recruiting them, wasn't it?"

"Like slaves," I could not help saying.

"Possibly," the captain quietly agreed. "Possibly. But give the slaves—as we did—plenty of food, good uniforms, nice red hats and new weapons—and they become proud soldiers, happy to be alive and to fight."

"Heroes, I assure you," the commandant went on. "Fezzan, Ethiopia, Eritrea . . ."

"Syria and Bir Hacheim," the captain concluded.

The two men knew what they were talking about. They had been in all these battles.

We were about to land.

"See you soon," the commandant said.

"We're bound to meet in London," the captain added.

His words startled me. He had spoken in Russian.

He smiled at my surprise and went on: "My family comes from Russia and, like you, I haven't forgotten my native tongue."

The bomber was bowling along the runway . . .

The commandant's name was Bourgoin and the captain's Conus.

Bourgoin was on his way to take command of the Free French parachute battalion. A year later, at the time of the Allied landings, he was to parachute into France at their head. The one-armed colonel was to become a legendary figure.

Less is known about Captain Conus' activities.

I did, in fact, often meet him again.

We had mutual friends among the little society that the Free French formed in London. For instance, Guy de Boissoudy who had lost a leg in Syria and made a parachute-jump with a wooden leg to win a bet of a case of champagne. Also Claude de Boislambert, another great big-game hunter in peace time, who had tried to raise Dakar in the summer of 1940, had been captured by Vichy partisans, imprisoned in the filthy prisons of Sénégal, and then transferred to a French prison from which he made a famous escape and managed to reach England.

I learned from them why and how Conus, the engineer, soon after his arrival in Africa, had abandoned a safe, highly-paid job with brilliant prospects for the risks and uncertainties of a hand-to-mouth existence. A director of his company, who had come out on a tour of inspection, spoke to him in a tone

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to which he took exception. Conus had hit the director. It had been a purely reflex action. He had not taken his own Herculean strength into consideration. According to some, the blow had sent the victim to hospital; according to others, to the grave. Conus had taken to the jungle till things blew over.

I learned, too, how Lieutenant Conus had become famous in the column Leclerc led from Chad to Tunisia. He had invented a method of mounting 75 m.m guns on trucks. This had been a great contribution to the victory.

But it was walking at night through London that I really got to know Conus. His wounded knee was better and he no longer needed a stick. He walked with a long, light, silent and indefatigable stride. One realised he could cover miles without tiring.

Was it due to the dark of the blackout, to the ruins vaguely outlined in the bombed areas, or to our similar origins that Conus emerged on these occasions from his usual reserve? I listened to him each time with renewed astonishment.

He was not at all the mere soldier of fortune, the rough adventurer, all of a piece and of a single texture, I had thought him on the airfield at Marrakesh and in the aircraft. Certainly, his toughness, physical strength, hazardous life, legendary hunting and campaigning were all strictly true. But with all this were mingled an acute sensitivity, an almost shy gentleness, a wide and refined culture in two languages, a love of poetry and a passion for music. The big-game hunter was a great pianist. The man of action, decision and furious energy held an unassuaged dream in his eyes and his voice sometimes quivered with a curious spiritual nostalgia.

Our meetings were very irregular. Conus would suddenly appear in London. The next day, without warning, he would have gone and no-one knew where. Once or twice I asked him to what corps or service he belonged. He replied evasively. At that time, many members of the Free French in England replied thus. I did not insist.

And then Conus disappeared for good. And I thought—without the least proof, but with absolute conviction—that he was in France doing some secret, dangerous work.

But I was soon appointed myself to a squadron for special missions and thought no more about him.

A few weeks after the liberation of Paris, I met Boislambert there. He gave me news of our friends.

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Bissagnet, who had escaped with him, had been killed in the 1st French Armoured Division. Médéric, one of the best leaders of the Resistance, had swallowed cyanide to escape the Gestapo.

Bourgoin had immensely distinguished himself.

"And Conus?" I asked.

"He came to see me in my office a few days ago," Boislambert said. "He told me his story of the Vercors in detail. As I already knew the outline, I got my secretary to take it down. She did so word for word. I'll send you a copy."

Boislambert said nothing more. But his voice and expression gave me the feeling that here was an exceptional adventure. But I was far from imagining how exceptional it was...

During the summer of 1944, a British aircraft used for secret work landed Conus in France. And he went to the Vercors massif, where the rugged mountains sheltered an important maquis.

Then, on 21 July, at dawn, German troops attacked from all sides. Their superiority in numbers and weapons was crushing. Without help, the maquisards could expect only a battle of despair. They could do nothing but kill the largest possible number of the enemy before being destroyed themselves. Their commander sent Conus through the German lines to ask for reinforcements.

Accompanied by two young lieutenants, of whom one was the Oisans liaison officer, he left Saint-Martin-du-Vercors during the afternoon of 21 July in the direction of Carençon. Their first attempt to break through the surrounding enemy was at Pas de la Sambre. An officer called Goderville acted as their guide. He was really the writer Jean Prévost.

It was raining in torrents. Through the downpour they saw that the FFI advance posts had been evacuated. A German patrol opened fire on them with machine-guns. Conus and his companions were forced to retreat.

Jean Prévost then went to find ten men, two of whom were guides. They were to try to pass the maquisards through the Pas de l'Ane. Jean Prévost then left them to go back to his post. He was killed the next morning.

It was still raining as hard as ever when the little party reached the Pas de l'Ane. They were suddenly stopped by an explosion. The leading guide had been blown up by a mine. The other was ordered to take the wounded man back to the camp.

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Night had fallen but it was still raining. Soaked to the skin, the file of hunted men groped their way through the mountains, searching the dark downpour for a pass or negotiable descent. Their blind quest had no success.

In the middle of the night they chanced on a woodcutter's hut, and took refuge in it. There was so little space that the seven soaking, harassed men could not even lie down but had to sit crowded together.

They started off again before dawn. This time, they had the woodcutters from the hut as guides. In thick, blinding mist, they started down a chimney the woodcutters thought practicable. But it proved not to be so without a rope. They had to seek elsewhere.

A few kilometres farther on the guides found another way down, which seemed negotiable. Conus and his companions started down it.

At the beginning, the usual path passed by the Pas de la Balme. This was held by an FFI post. But long before they reached it they heard machine-gun fire coming from its direction. By difficult paths, they made a detour round the post and avoided it. The noise of firing gradually died away. The Germans had destroyed the post.

At last they had passed through the ring of fire and iron encircling the Vercors. The fugitives might have hoped to reach Château-Bernard, a nearby village with safe hiding, without further obstacle. But every village in the whole countryside was full of German troops on the alert; and the police were carefully checking the inhabitants. The maquisards therefore buried their weapons. Conus even threw away the cyanide pill, which all the Resistance fighters from England carried, so that they might choose between torture and suicide if they were captured.

Having taken these precautions, they entered Château-Bernard.

Their first concern was to tidy themselves up so as not to attract attention. Bearded, dirty and soaking wet, they looked like escaped convicts. A friendly farm on the outskirts of the village took them in. They washed, shaved and dried their clothes. Conus was now ready to continue his mission.

To leave Château-Bernard, they had to pass a German road block in the rue Saint-Guillaume. The maquisards presented themselves with their false papers in their hands. The officer in command of the road block did not even look at the papers; he had orders to hand all strangers over to

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the German police. This meant a strict interrogation and a detailed search. And Conus had micro-films of codes and figures on him. He had also 200,000 francs in his bag.

The police showed extreme violence from the first. The Allies' successful landing and advance, and the Vercors insurrection nearby tended to increase their accustomed brutality.

However, before being handed over to the agents of the Gestapo, Conus succeeded in taking the micro-films from his pocket and concealing them between his thumb and forefinger. While the search lasted—and it was long and detailed—he was made to hold his hands against a wall. The micro-films were not discovered.

But Conus had no illusions. There would be enough indications of who they were found on himself, his companions or their belongings to be fatal to them. The game was up. He bitterly regretted having parted with the brown pill that gave supreme freedom.

Indeed, the interrogation soon became almost a massacre. The German police threw themselves on Conus with such brutality that, in spite of his strength and athlete's resistance, he collapsed under their blows. When he fell, they began pounding him ruthlessly with their boots, revolver-butts and batons. Throughout the savage hammering, his one thought was to cover and conceal the micro-films.

The police, having failed to extract any information from their victims, put them in a van. There were already three young men from the maquis in it.

As they were getting into the vehicle, Conus found himself next to the Oisans liaison officer. He whispered to him, "Let's take a chance and seize the escort's weapons."

"I can't," muttered the lieutenant. "I live here. They know my real name. My family would pay for it."

The door of the van shut on the prisoners.

They were taken to Vif. There they were interrogated again, even more barbarously. Conus was the one who suffered most. His companions, by involuntary, unconscious gestures, had shown him deference. The packets of bank notes found in his bag had consecutive numbers. That was enough to prove he was the leader.

The first question they asked him showed this well enough.

"Have you been sent from Algiers or London?"

They dislocated his shoulder with leather thongs. They crushed the ends of his fingers with batons. They held

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lighted matches to his eyes and threatened to burn them out.

The torture went on—in vain—from two o'clock in the afternoon till nine at night.

Then, tottering, bloody, broken and disfigured, the maquisards were pushed, indeed thrown on top of one another, into a truck which immediately drove off. After some fifteen kilometres they were made to get out near the village of Saint-Barthélemy, opposite a disused lime kiln.

The Germans had told them nothing, but they heard the rattle of weapons behind them and knew that they had reached the end of the road. The believers—among whom were the liaison officer and Conus—said a brief prayer. The others waited the end in silence.

However, the place selected for the execution was not where the truck had stopped. The condemned had to walk five hundred yards along a ravine through which flowed a stream.

I have transcribed Conus' feelings during his walk to execution from the account he gave Boislambert and which, unknown to him, was taken down word for word. I seem to hear his calm, low voice.

"At that moment," Conus told his friend, "I was completely resigned to dying. I could not move my arms. I merely felt a certain curiosity.

"We were made to sit down in a field above the ravine. We were surrounded by a guard of six men with pistols, submachine guns and rifles at the ready. The nine others went farther up to have a look at the ground. The German warrant officer shouted: 'Send them along two by two!'

"Four men came down, selected a lieutenant and a young man from the maquis and made them go twenty yards above us. They made them kneel down and killed them with pistol, sub-machine gun and rifle fire.

"At that moment, I began to hear the stream in the ravine. The sound of it broke the resignation in which I was sunk. I decided to attempt something before dying."

Yes, I seem to hear Conus' voice. I am sure that, in telling his story it appeared quite natural to him that the sound of rushing water should have renewed the desire to live in a heart already prepared for death.

At once, all Conus' instincts, as a hunter, tracker, athlete and soldier, were ready to do his behest. One quick, all-embracing glance, was enough for him to gauge distances and size up the situation in the evening light of the long summer's day, the shape of the terrain and the positions of the guards.

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On his left, a Feldwebel was holding his P38 pistol uncocked and in a totally incorrect manner, Conus judged. On his right, there were two soldiers armed with sub-machine guns which he recognised as Schmeissers. A little farther off, there were two more guards, also armed with sub-machine guns. Finally, in front of him, between himself and the steep slope down to the bed of the stream below, was a man with a Mauser rifle.

And, from his high cheekbones and narrow-lidded eyes, Conus, in one of those moments of peculiarly lucid intuition, felt sure that the man was one of those Russian deserters whom the Germans incorporated in their punitive detachments. And he saw that the Russian was staring fixedly and with a strange reverence at a point in his blood-stained chest which was bare owing to his ragged clothing. And he realised that this grave attention was directed at the cross hanging from his neck. It occurred to him that this Mongol-faced guard was profoundly and superstitiously religious.

However the executions were continuing.

The warrant officer in charge shouted: "Next!"

The Feldwebel superintending the group of men to be shot then cried: "March!" He waved his pistol negligently to order the nearest two men to get up and walk the twenty yards to the death place.

Together with the other details, this had also been noted by Conus, whose mind, senses and muscles were tensed to the uttermost. Before he knew it himself, his decision had been taken and his plan made.

There was a burst of fire and two maquisards fell dead.

"Next!" cried the warrant officer.

"March!" shouted the Feldwebel.

The Oisans liaison officer and his neighbour got to their feet. They walked a few paces and Conus saw them shot.

It was now his turn. To those of his companions who remained he said a hasty farewell as if he were resigned to his end. But to the last, a boy of seventeen, he could not help whispering. "Watch out and good luck."

Then Conus heard the metallic voice shouting once again: "Next!"

And the other replying: "March!"

Conus gave the Feldwebel's pistol a furtive glance. As he had expected, the weapon was waved vaguely in his direction to indicate that he should climb the slope. This was the signal he was waiting for.

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He got slowly to his feet, his body tensely gathered like a coiled spring. And at the moment it uncoiled, he fixed his eyes with all his will to live on those of the deserter from the Red Army, who was barring his way to the ravine, and shouted in Russian: "As you believe in God, don't fire!"

And Conus who, three minutes before, had been exhausted weak and despairing, took off like a hundred yards' runner, and made straight for the Russian. And the Russian, instead of firing, stood aside and let the condemned man pass . . .

On reading this passage in Conus' account, I remembered my astonishment when, without warning, he had suddenly addressed me in Russian in the American bomber. And I could easily imagine the sort of sacred shock that must have petrified the devout peasant from the Volga, the Urals or Siberia, whom the chances of war and servitude had brought to these French hills, when he suddenly heard this appeal to his faith in his native tongue.

But the other guards and executioners had no similar reasons for sparing Conus. As he dashed forward, he saw in the gathering twilight the flash of the negligent Feldwebel's pistol. Then all the sub-machine guns came into action. There was a crackling of dozens of shots.

But the effect of surprise impaired their aim as did the speed with which Conus moved. He was already on the edge of the ravine. He gathered himself together and jumped as far out as he could. He landed some thirty feet down.

His luck held and his fall was broken by a large hazel tree. He tumbled out of the tree and dashed down the slope. The Germans kept up a continuous fire from above. He was not hit. But when he reached the bottom of the ravine, he had to halt to recover his breath.

He took advantage of this necessary respite to have a quick look at the terrain. The slope beyond the stream was bare and without a single tree. There was no shelter there.

Conus therefore fled along the ravine on the same bank. He soon came to an area covered thickly by brambles. He dived into them and lay flat, dug into the mud and covered himself with dead leaves. It was time. His pursuers had reached the bottom of the slope.

And here, from the shorthand account, is the end of Conus' story.

"The brambles covered an area of some ten by two hundred yards. The Germans beat it yard by yard, searching the thickets with sticks and bayonets. The Feldwebel came to a

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halt with his boots a yard from my head. I saw the brambles move above my head. I heard the Germans discussing the situation. One said he was sure he had wounded me. The others were promising me a peculiarly unpleasant death. Then the beaters moved past me. I could hear my heart beating against my ribs. I was completely exhausted. I could scarcely move my arms.

"Ten minutes later, the Germans came back and searched the thicket again, even more carefully. But the brambles and the mud with which I had covered myself saved me.

"The Germans held a council of war ten yards from me. I heard them mention the word *Hund* (dog) and I realised I would have to be quick.

"I heard a German go down to the road and a car start. It was now night. I began to disengage myself from the brambles and the mud. I slipped into the stream. I could see two German sentries on the other side, about thirty yards apart.

"I crawled between them and climbed up the same side of the ravine by which I had come down. I passed within five yards of my companions' bodies. I crawled into a cornfield. Then I followed a stream which took me to the road. I rolled across the road, fell into a field and reached the Gresse. I went into the stream and followed the Gresse for five hundred yards. At this moment, I was strongly tempted to give up and seek refuge in a farm I knew five kilometres away.

"Then having thought it over, I continued on my way, taking my direction from the stars: east south-east.

"I walked all night, sometimes falling asleep from sheer fatigue. When the cold woke me, I went on again. At two o'clock the next afternoon, I arrived within sight of the Drac valley where I knew the bridge was guarded by the Germans. I saw an old woman in a field and took the risk of accosting her. When she saw me, she began to weep and said: 'My poor *monsieur*, hide yourself. I will fetch *Monsieur le Curé*.'

"The priest took me to a farm. They fed me. Some maquisards came to fetch me and help me cross the Drac by a cable. They took me to the Chief of the Isère FFI to whom I gave my message. I had preserved the micro-films. I was able to establish my codes and send a first appeal to London to ask for equipment for the Isère units who were to make a diversion to relieve the Vercors."

When I had read this account, and had recovered from the emotions it aroused, I telephoned Boislambert.

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"Yes," he said. "We both know a good many astonishing stories of the Resistance. But none like this."

"What about Conus?" I asked. "How is he?"

"Fighting fit," Boislambert said.

"Where is he?"

"In the Ruhr," Boislambert said. "That's all I know."

At that time, the Allies were still on the right bank of the Rhine.

Hitler had committed suicide and the Germans had surrendered unconditionally. I ran into Conus on the Champs-Elysées. We walked a little way together.

He was as broad-shouldered and vigorous-looking as ever. I said, "You're looking very well for someone who's been executed!"

He made a face and replied, "Forget it. It's ancient history. Besides, to have been a game animal oneself for once is not an entirely pleasant memory." He laughed and added, "However, at Dusseldorf, I had a pretty satisfying bag to add to my gamebook."

"When was that?" I asked.

"Before the crossing of the Rhine," Conus said.

"Then you mean in enemy territory?"

"Oh, in plain clothes and with a good team and good tools . . ." Conus said.

He did not bother to explain how he had crossed the lines and lived in a German town full of troops and Gestapo . . .

"My mission was to gather information," he went on in the same light, conversational tone. "But where were you to get it in a terror-stricken town which was being continuously bombed by the British, the Americans and the French? The streets were nothing but ruins, and the population thought of nothing but taking cover. It was not much good nosing about in that."

We had reached a café.

"A drink will do us good," Conus said.

When our drinks came, he went on, "In fact, it was the panic and disorder that gave me my chance. One day, as the wounded, the mutilated and the dead were being brought out from a totally destroyed working-class district, I heard some women mutter, 'The rich get away with it all right. With those luxurious six-storey underground shelters of theirs, lifts and all, they don't have to worry.

"The word *lift* was like a sudden flash of light. That very

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evening, during a lull in the raids, I assembled some of my men in front of a block which housed the headquarters of one of the big Ruhr trusts. We killed the caretaker and the liftman, whom we found in a magnificent basement, and took their uniforms. Two of our men disguised themselves and the rest of us went down. There really were six storeys of concrete below ground. The bottom one was, of course, the safest and the best fitted up. We didn't have to wait long. That night the bombers really surpassed themselves. The lift-bell rang continuously. It was merely a question of going up and collecting the customers."

Conus burst out laughing.

"And what customers!" he went on. "High officials, big industrialists, chiefs of police, generals. That cellar, secure from bombs, comfortably upholstered and carefully furnished, provided with food and drink, was their club, their safety club.

We tied them up and interrogated them one after the other. And we got information all right that night, and good information at that."

We had finished our drinks.

"And now?" I asked. "Now that there's no more war."

"I'm going to see what's happening at home, in Africa," Conus said.

His eyes suddenly grew bright.

"I'm going to try out some sporting rifles I picked up in Germany. They're superb."

These and a racing car were his booty...

After his demobilisation, Colonel Bourgoin had been appointed chief game warden to the Ministry of France Overseas. The old poacher's job was to see that the regulations concerning elephants and the hides of wild animals, which he had himself disregarded for so long, were properly applied.

"It's rather like the story of Vidocq," he said. "The outlaw becomes chief of police."

One day, I told him of my last conversation with Conus.

"He's not in Africa at all," Bourgoin said. "It was suggested he should do a tour of duty in Indo-China. He jumped at it."

Bourgoin glanced for a second at his empty right sleeve—regret, resignation?—and went on, "He's a colonel now. He's got a commando unit which he has built up man by man. He'll make the sparks fly all right."

Months went by. From time to time I heard Conus' name

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mentioned by people returning from the Far East. His unit was famous for the lightning speed with which it moved, its furious courage in battle, its inexhaustible resistance to physical hardship and its pitiless severity in repression.

And then I heard from Conus. He was in Paris and invited me to dine.

Our meeting was, as always, friendly, pleasant and gay. Yet his voice seemed more subdued, more veiled, than usual. There seemed to me to be also a strange weariness in his eyes.

"When are you going back to Indo-China?" I asked him.

"Never," Conus said. "It seems I've picked up some mysterious disease out there. No-one seems to know whether it's a microbe, a virus or a parasite. I shall become an habitué of Val-de-Grâce."

"And that's why..."

I did not complete my question, but he understood and said, "You're quite right, that's not why I've given up."

He toyed a moment with his empty glass, and then looked at me, his eyes full of a quiet, sad weariness.

"I've had enough of killing people," he said. "I've been doing nothing else for the last five years. In Africa, in France, in Germany and in the rice fields. Killing all the time!"

He smiled, but only with the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, I'm an expert! I've had the best tuition. In England, at the secret missions' school, the most famous surgeons showed us how to go neatly for the heart and cut a cardial artery in the proper manner... I went into it wholeheartedly. There are people who haven't any idea how to make war..."

He played with his glass again, looked away, and went on, "Only it's like this... You take a Vietnam village whose inhabitants have been accomplices to an ambush in which some of your comrades have been killed. All right, no-one will talk. So you line up the inhabitants and you shoot one in ten. It's the usual dose. All right. And as you put your pistol to the back of his head, the chap—a peasant, an artisan, a student—cries from his heart, 'Long live liberty!' or: 'I don't mind dying, there are others.' And then another village, and another. And always killing. So, I let them have their way with me about Val-de-Grâce."

However, he did not let them have their way with him for long. He left for Africa.

And this is what I heard.

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Conus took his plantation in hand again. Then organised an enormous safari.

While hunting, did he think with a tender smile of Bourgoin, his old friend and accomplice, whose duty it now was to enforce the laws he was in process of breaking so lightheartedly, armed with the German rifles which were part of his wartime booty?

Whether stalking or driving, the safari was a triumph. To celebrate it, Conus, on his return, invited his numerous friends in the district to dinner. Towards the end of the meal, Conus got to his feet, squared his athletic shoulders, and picked up a glass of champagne. He raised it to his lips and fell dead.

Thus died the man who had given back its song to a stream in the mountains of the Vercors.

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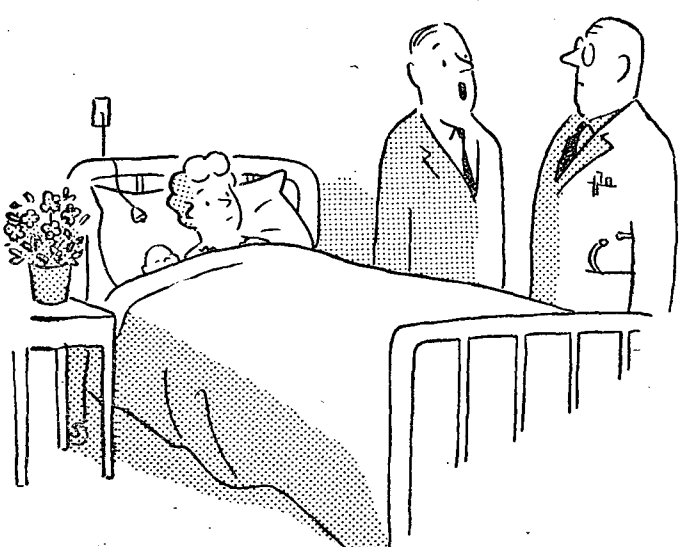
Translated from the French by Humphrey Hare, from "They Weren't All Angels"



"Now about the obstetrical fee. Do we pay you or the taxi driver?"

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Every paradise has its serpent, and this one is so infested by mosquitoes during the season when picnics seem most natural, that those of my visitors who have been taken there for a treat have invariably lost their tempers, and made the quiet shores ring with their wailing and lamentations. These despicable but irritating insects don't seem to have anything to do but to sit in multitudes on the sand, waiting for any prey Providence may send them; and as soon as the carriage appears, they rise up in a cloud, and rush to meet us, almost dragging us out bodily, and never leave us until we drive away again . . . *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*

A Howling Mistake

You feel very old, or your back is too cold, and long-leggety beasties are biting you,
Or you're suffering stings from mosquito-like things that are dancing but hardly delighting you;
You are loath to be rude, but you're hating the food, which is certainly unsatisfying;
Mainly damp-looking lettuce, which felons in fetters might feed on if very near dying;
There is molten icecream, which you do not esteem—when you're dry there is milk going curdly,
For the tool isn't here that they open the beer with, you've left it behind most absurdly;
Then the children get hurt, lie and howl in the dirt, and you shout at 'em, smack 'em, and shake 'em,
And you swear that again (walking home in the rain), for a picnic you never will take 'em!

J. A. LINDON

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Picnicontest

From the other side of the bank of rhododendrons came the clamorous altercations, objections and prohibitions of a British picnic party in full cry.

Mother beset by flies, wasps, hornets and bees handing out, "One cheese and tomato for you, one cheese and tomato for you, one ham and tongue for you, one ham and tongue for you—" and then the sudden hoarse cry, "Mind me tea!" —followed by, "Now look what you've done!" and "Mop it up before it gets into the cake!"

On the other side of the bank of rhododendrons we smiled at one another in a worldly way. "I do believe," said George, "it would be wise if I were to make another pitcher of that excellent Martini."

From behind the rhododendrons came the frightened cry of a child—"There's a nawful thing in my milk!" followed instantly by, "Gawd, all over me trousers!"

George's wife gave him a gracious hostess smile. "Why don't you do that, dear," she said. "It will give the Chablis a little more time to cool."

"You have, of course," said Arthur, elegantly propped on one elbow, "included a little sherry in the turtle soup?"

"But of course," said George's wife. We all smiled gently upon one another again, true connoisseurs in the art of the alfresco lunch . . .

PATRICK CAMPBELL

Matter over Mind

IDEA: Have picnic in car. Lovely soup in Thermos. No wasps, ants. Exhilarating walk on deserted moor, beach, come back to soup, pies, fruit, wine.

REALITY: No walk. Raining so hard that get drenched simply going to boot for great basket, bottles, Thermos, pot, et cetera and returning. Parked in grass lane overlooking sodden valley. Vast puddle outside door but do not move car, uneasy feeling wheels won't grip farther on . . .

IDEA: Even in summer picnic, car useful base, flat surface for bottles, featherweight cups that won't stand up in grass.

REALITY: Even in summer only flat surface on outside of car is dead centre of bonnet—no running board, et cetera nowadays. In winter, all flat surfaces inside car occupied by feet, knocking over featherweight cups. Children think top of seat-back is flat. Proved otherwise. Soup hot, at least . . .

PAUL JENNINGS, *The Picnic Mirage*

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CHINOISERIE

THIS is the story of Olga Kyrilovna and how she disappeared in the heart of Old Pekin.

Not Peiping, with its American drugstore on Hatamen Street. Pekin, capital of the Manchu Empire. Didn't you know that I used to be language clerk at the Legation there? Long ago. Long before the Boxer Uprising. Oh, yes, I was young. So young I was in love with Olga Kyrilovna . . .

When the nine great gates of the Tartar City swung to at sunset, we were locked for the night inside a walled, medieval citadel. An Arabian Nights' city where the nine gate towers on the forty-foot walls were just ninety-nine feet high so they would not impede the flight of air spirits. Where palace eunuchs kept harems of their own to "save face." Where musicians were blinded because the use of the eye destroys the subtlety of the ear. Where physicians prescribed powdered jade and tigers' claws for anaemia brought on by malnutrition. Where mining operations were dangerous because they opened the veins of the Earth Dragon.

It was into this world of fantasy and fear that Olga Kyrilovna vanished as completely as if she had dissolved into one of

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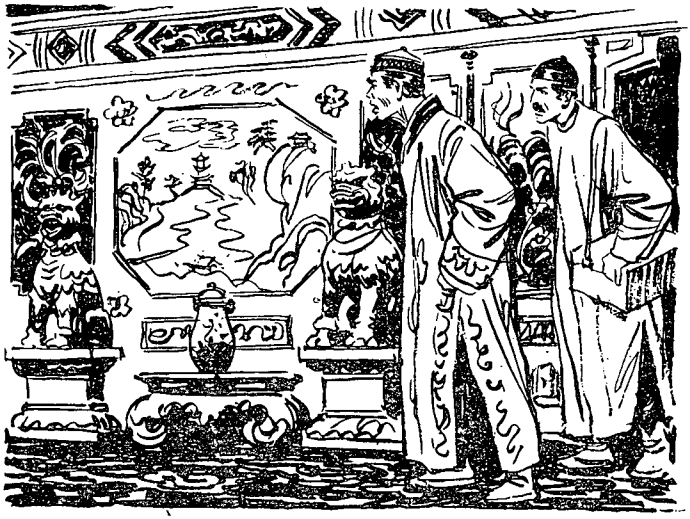

BY HELEN McCLOY

the air spirits or ridden away on one of the invisible dragons that our Chinese servants saw in the atmosphere all around us.

It happened the night of a New Year's Eve ball at the Japanese Legation.

When I reached the Russian Legation for dinner, a Cossack of the Escort took me into a room that was once a Tartar General's audience hall. Two dozen candle flames hardly pierced the bleak dusk. The fire in the brick stove barely dulled the cutting edge of a North China winter. I chafed my hands, thinking myself alone. Someone stirred and sighed in the shadows. It was she.

Olga Kyrilovna . . . How can I make you see her as I saw her that evening? She was pale in her white dress against walls of tarnished gilt and rusted vermilion. Two smooth, shining wings of light brown hair. An oval face, pure in line, delicate in colour. And, of course, unspoiled by modern cosmetics. Her eyes were blue. Dreaming eyes. She seemed to live and move in a waking dream, remote from the enforced intimacies of our narrow society. More than one man had tried vainly to wake her from that dream. The

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piquancy of her situation provoked men like Lucien de l'Orges, the French *Chargé*.

She was just seventeen, fresh from the convent of Smolny. Volgorughi had been Russian Minister in China for many years. After his last trip to Petersburg, he had brought Olga back to Pekin as his bride, and . . . Well, he was three times her age.

That evening she spoke first. "Monsieur Charley . . ."

Even at official meetings the American Minister called me "Charley." Most Europeans assumed it was my last name.

"I'm glad you are here," she went on in French, our only common language. "I was beginning to feel lonely. And afraid."

"Afraid?" I repeated stupidly. "Of what?"

A door opened. Candle flames shied and the startled shadows leapt up the walls. Volgorughi spoke from the doorway, coolly. "Olga, we are having sherry in the study . . . Oh!" His voice warmed. "Monsieur Charley, I didn't see you. Good evening."

I followed Olga's filmy skirts into the study, conscious of Volgorughi's sharp glance as he stood aside to let me pass. He always seemed rather formidable. In spite of his grizzled hair, he had the leanness of a young man and the carriage of a soldier. But he had the weary eyes of an old man. And the dry, shrivelled hands, always cold to the touch, even in summer. A young man's imagination shrank from any mental image of those hands caressing Olga.

In the smaller room it was warmer and brighter. Glasses of sherry and vodka had been pushed aside to make space on the table for a painting on silk. Brown, frail, desiccated as a dead leaf, the silk looked hundreds of years old. Yet the ponies painted on its fragile surface in faded pigments were the same lively Mongol ponies we still used for race meetings outside the city walls.

"The Chinese have no understanding of art," drawled Lucien de l'Orges. "Chinese porcelain is beginning to enjoy a certain vogue in Europe, but Chinese painters are impossible. In landscape they show objects on a flat surface, without perspective, as if the artist were looking down on the earth from a balloon. In portraits they draw the human face without shadows or thickness as untutored children do. The Chinese artist hasn't enough skill to imitate nature accurately."

Lucien was baiting Volgorughi. "Pekin temper" was as much a feature of our lives as "Pekin throat." We got on

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each other's nerves like a storm-stayed house party. An unbalanced party where men outnumbered women six to one.

Volgorughi kept his temper. "The Chinese artist doesn't care to 'imitate' nature. He prefers to suggest or symbolise."

"But Chinese art is heathen!" This was Sybil Carstairs, wife of the English Inspector-General of Maritime Customs. "How can heathen art equal art inspired by Christian morals?"

Her husband's objection was more practical: "You're wastin' money, Volgorughi. Two hundred Shanghai taels for a daub that will never fetch sixpence in any European market!"

Incredible? No. This was before Hirth and Fenollosa made Chinese painting fashionable in the West. Years later I saw a fragment from Volgorughi's collection sold in the famous *Salle Six* of the Hotel Drouot. While the *commissaire-priseur* was bawling, "*On demande quatre cent mille francs,*" I was seeing Olga again, pale in a white dress against a wall of gilt and vermilion in the light of shivering candle flames...

Volgorughi turned to her just then. "Olga, my dear, you haven't any sherry." He smiled as he held out a glass. The brown wine turned to gold in the candlelight as she lifted it to her lips with an almost childish obedience.

I had not noticed little Kiada, the Japanese Minister, bending over the painting. Now he turned sleepy slant-eyes on Volgorughi and spoke blandly. "This is the work of Han Kan, greatest of horse painters. It must be the finest painting of the T'ang Dynasty now in existence."

"You think so, Count?" Volgorughi was amused. He seemed to be yielding to an irresistible temptation as he went on. "What would you say if I told you I knew of a T'ang painting infinitely finer—a landscape scroll by Wang Wei himself?"

Kiada's eyes lost their sleepy look. He had all his nation's respect for Chinese art, tinctured with jealousy of the older culture. "One hears rumours now and then that these fabulous masterpieces still exist, hidden away in the treasure chests of great Chinese families. But I have never seen an original Wang Wei."

"Who, or what, is Wang Wei?" Sybil sounded petulant.

Kiada lifted his glass of sherry to the light. "Madam, Wang Wei could place scenery extending to ten thousand *li* upon the small surface of a fan. He could paint cats that

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would keep any house free from mice. When his hour came to Pass Above, he did not die. He merely stepped through a painted doorway in one of his own landscapes and was never seen again. All these things indicate that his brush was guided by a god."

Volgorughi leaned across the table, looking at Kiada. "What would you say if I told you that I had just added a Wang Wei to my collection?"

Kiada showed even, white teeth. "Nothing but respect for your Excellency's judgment could prevent my insisting that it was a copy by some lesser artist of the Yuan Dynasty—possibly Chao Meng fu. An original Wang Wei could not be bought for money."

"Indeed?" Volgorughi unlocked a cabinet with a key he carried on his watch chain. He took something out and tossed it on the table like a man throwing down a challenge. It was a cylinder in an embroidered satin cover. Kiada peeled off the cover and we saw a scroll on a roller of old milk-jade.

It was a broad ribbon of silk, once white, now ripened with great age to a mellow brown. A foot wide, sixteen feet long, painted lengthwise to show the course of a river. As it unrolled, a stream of pure lapis, jade and turquoise hues flowed before my enchanted eyes, almost like a moving picture. Born in a bubbling spring, fed by waterfalls, the river wound its way among groves of tender, green bamboo, parks with dappled deer peeping through slender pine trees, cottages with curly roofs nestling among round hills, verdant meadows, fantastic cliffs, strange wind-distorted trees, rushes, wild geese and at last, a foam-flecked sea.

Kiada's face was a study. He whispered brokenly, "I can hear the wind sing in the rushes. I can hear the wail of the wild geese. Of Wang Wei truly is it written—his pictures were unspoken poems."

"And the colour!" cried Volgorughi, ecstasy in his eyes.

Lucien's sly voice murmured in my ear. "A younger man, married to Olga Kyrilovna, would have no time for painting, Chinese or otherwise."

Volgorughi had Kiada by the arm. "This is no copy by Chao Meng fu! Look at that inscription on the margin. Can you read it?"

Kiada glanced—then stared. There was more than suspicion in the look he turned on Volgorughi. There was fear. "I must beg your Excellency to excuse me. I do not read Chinese."

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We were interrupted by a commotion in the compound. A gaunt Cossack, in full-skirted coat and sheepskin cap, was coming through the gate carrying astride his shoulders a young man, elegantly slim, in an officer's uniform. The Cossack knelt on the ground. The rider slipped lightly from his unconventional mount. He sauntered past the window and a moment later he was entering the study with a nonchalance just this side of insolence. To my amazement I saw that he carried a whip which he handed with his gloves to the Chinese boy who opened the door.

"Princess, your servant. Excellency, my apologies. I believe I'm late."

Volgorughi returned the greeting with the condescension of a Western Russian for an Eastern Russian—a former officer of *Chevaliers Gardes* for an obscure Colonel of Oussurian Cossacks. Sometimes I wondered why such a bold adventurer as Alexei Andreitch Liakoff had been appointed Russian Military Attaché in Pekin. He was born in Tobolsk, where there is Tartar blood. His oblique eyes, high cheekbones and sallow, hairless skin lent colour to his impudent claim of descent from Genghis Khan.

"Are Russian officers in the habit of using their men as saddle horses?" I muttered to Carstairs.

Alexei's quick ear caught the words. "It may become a habit with me." He seemed to relish my discomfiture. "I don't like Mongol ponies. A Cossack is just as sure-footed. And much more docile."

Olga Kyrilovna roused herself to play hostess. "Sherry, Colonel Liakoff? Or vodka?"

"Vodka, if her Excellency pleases." Alexei's voice softened as he spoke to Olga. His eyes dwelt on her face gravely.

The ghost of mockery touched Volgorughi's lips. He despised vodka as a peasant's drink.

Alexei approached the table to set down his empty glass. For the first time, his glance fell on the painting by Wang Wei. His glass crashed on the marble floor.

"You read Chinese, don't you?" Volgorughi spoke austerely. "Perhaps you can translate this inscription?"

Alexei put both hands wide apart on the table and leaned on them studying the ideographs. "*Wang Wei.* And a date. The same as our A.D. 740."

"And the rest?" insisted Volgorughi.

Alexei looked at him. "Your Excellency really wishes me to read this? Aloud?"

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"By all means."

Alexei went on. "*At an odd moment in summer I came across this painting of a river course by Wang Wei. Under its influence I sketched a spray of peach blossom on the margin as an expression of my sympathy for the artist and his profound and mysterious work. The Words of the Emperor. Written in the Lai Ching summerhouse, 1746.*"

Kiada had been frightened when he looked at that inscription. Alexei was angry. Why I did not know.

Carstairs broke the silence. "I don't see anything mysterious about a picture of a river!"

"Everything about this picture is—mysterious." Kiada glanced at Volgorughi. "May one inquire how your Excellency obtained this incomparable masterpiece?"

"From a peddler in the Chinese City." Volgorughi's tone forbade further questions. Just then his Number One Boy announced dinner.

There was the usual confusion when we started for the ball at the Japanese Legation. Mongol ponies had to be blindfolded before they would let men in European dress mount and even then they were skittish. For this reason it was the custom for men to walk and for women to drive in hooded Pekin carts. But Sybil Carstairs always defied this convention, exclaiming, "Why should I be bumped black and blue in a springless cart just because I am a woman?"

She and her husband were setting out on foot when Olga's little cart clattered into the compound driven by a Chinese groom. Kiada had gone on ahead to welcome his early guests. Volgorughi lifted Olga into the cart. She was quite helpless in a Siberian cloak of blue fox paws and clumsy Mongol socks of white felt over her dancing slippers. Her head drooped against Volgorughi's shoulder drowsily as he put her down in the cart. He drew the fur cloak around her in a gesture that seemed tenderly possessive. She lifted languid eyes.

"Isn't Lady Carstairs driving with me?"

"My dear, you know she never drives in a Pekin cart. You are not afraid?" Volgorughi smiled. "You will be quite safe, Olga Kyrilovna. I promise you that."

Her answering smile wavered. Then the hood hid her face from view as the cart rattled through the gateway.

Volgorughi and Lucien walked close behind Olga's cart. Alexei and I followed more slowly. Our Chinese lantern boys ran ahead of us in the darkness to light our way like the link

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men of medieval London. Street lamps in Pekin were lighted only once a month—when the General of the Nine Gates made his rounds of inspection.

The lantern light danced down a long, empty lane winding between high, blank walls. A stinging Siberian wind threw splinters of sleet in my face. We hadn't the macadamised roads of the Treaty Ports. The frozen mud was hard and slippery as glass. I tried to keep to a ridge that ran down the middle of the road. My foot slipped and I stumbled down the slope into a foul gutter of sewage frozen solid. The lanterns turned a corner. I was alone with the black night and the icy wind.

I groped my way along the gutter, one hand against the wall. No stars, no moon, no lighted windows, no other pedestrians. My boot met something soft that yielded and squirmed. My voice croaked a question in Mandarin, "Is this the way to the Japanese Legation?"

The answer came in singsong Cantonese. I understood only one word: "Alms . . ."

Like heaven itself, I saw a distant flicker of light coming nearer. Like saints standing in the glow of their own halos I recognised Alexei and our lantern boys. "What happened?" Alexei's voice was taut. "I came back as soon as I missed you."

"Nothing. I fell. I was just asking this . . ."

Words died on my lips. Lantern light revealed the blunted lion-face, the eyeless sockets—a leper. And I had been about to touch him.

Alexei's gaze followed mine to the beggar, hunched against the wall. "She is one of the worst I've ever seen."

"She?"

"I think it's a woman. Or, shall I say, it was a woman?" Alexei laughed harshly. "Shall we go on?"

We rounded the next corner before I recovered my voice. "These beggars aren't all as wretched as they seem, are they?"

"What put that idea into your head, Charley?"

"Something that happened last summer. We were in a market lane of the Chinese City—Sybil Carstairs and Olga Kyrilovna, Lucien and I. A beggar, squatting in the gutter, stared at us as if he had never seen Western men before. He looked like any other beggar—filthy, naked to the waist, with tattered blue trousers below. But his hands were toying with a little image carved in turquoise matrix. It looked old and valuable."

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"He may have stolen it."

"It wasn't as simple as that," I retorted. "A man in silk rode up on a mule leading a white pony with a silver embroidered saddle. He called the beggar 'elder brother' and invited him to mount the pony. Then the two rode off together."

Alexei's black eyes glittered like jet beads in the lantern light. "Was the beggar the elder of the two?"

"No. That's the queer part. The beggar was young. The man who called him 'elder brother' was old and dignified... Some beggars at home have savings accounts. I suppose the same sort of thing could happen here."

Again Alexei laughed harshly. "Hold on to that idea, Charley, if it makes you feel more comfortable."

We came to a gate where lanterns clustered like a cloud of fireflies. A piano tinkled. In the compound, lantern boys were gathering outside the windows of a ballroom, tittering as they watched barbarian demons "jump" to Western music.

Characteristically, the Japanese Legation was the only European house in Pekin. Candle flames and crystal prisms. Wall mirrors and a polished parquet floor. The waltz from *Traviata*. The glitter of diamonds and gold braid. Punch *à la Romaine*.

"Where is Princess Volgorughi?" I asked Sybil Carstairs.

"Didn't she come with you and Colonel Liakoff?"

"No. Her cart followed you. We came afterwards."

"Perhaps she's in the supper-room." Sybil whirled off with little Kiada.

Volgorughi was standing in the doorway of the supper room with Lucien and Carstairs. "She'll be here in a moment," Carstairs was saying.

Alexei spoke over my shoulder. "Charley and I have just arrived. We did not pass her Excellency's cart on the way."

"Perhaps she turned back," said Lucien.

"In that case she would have passed us," returned Alexei. "Who was with her?"

Volgorughi's voice came out in a hoarse whisper. "Her groom and lantern boy. Both Chinese. But Kiada and the Carstairs' were just ahead of her; Monsieur de l'Orges and I, just behind her."

"Not all the way," amended Lucien. "We took a wrong turning and got separated from each other in the dark. That was when we lost sight of her."

"My fault." Volgorughi's mouth twisted bitterly. "I was

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leading the way. And it was I who told her she would be—safe."

Again we breasted the wind to follow lanterns skimming before us like will-o'-the-wisps. Vainly we strained our eyes through glancing lights and broken shadows. We met no-one. We saw nothing. Not even a footprint or wheel rut on that frozen ground. Once something moaned in the void beyond the lights. It was only the leper.

At the gate of the Russian Legation, the Cossack guard sprang to attention. Volgorughi rapped out a few words in Russian. I knew enough to understand the man's reply. "The *baryna* has not returned, Excellency. There has been no sign of her or her cart."

Volgorughi was shouting. Voices, footfalls, lights filled the compound. Alexei struck his forehead with his clenched hand. "Fool that I am! The leper!"

He walked so fast I could hardly keep up with him. The lantern boys were running. A Cossack came striding after us. Alexei halted at the top of the ridge. The leper had not moved.

Alexei spoke sharply in Mandarin. "Have you seen a cart?" No answer.

"When she asked me for alms, she spoke Cantonese," I told him. He repeated his question in Cantonese. Both Volgorughi and Alexei spoke the southern dialects. All the rest of us were content to stammer Mandarin.

Still no answer. The Cossack stepped down into the gutter. His great boot prodded the shapeless thing that lay there. It toppled sidewise.

Alexei moved down the slope. "Lights!" The lanterns shuddered and came nearer. The handle of a knife protruded from the leper's left breast.

Alexei forced himself to drop on one knee beside that obscene corpse. He studied it intently, without touching it.

"Murdered . . . There are many knives like that in the Chinese City. Anyone might have used it—Chinese or European." He rose, brushing his knee with his gloved hand.

"Why?" I ventured.

"She couldn't see." His voice was judicious. "She must have heard—something."

"But what?"

Alexei's Asiatic face was inscrutable in the light from the paper lanterns.

Police? Extraterritorial law courts? That was Treaty Port

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stuff. Like pidgin English. We had only a few legation guards. No gunboats. No telegraph . . . Dawn came. We were still searching. Olga Kyrilovna, her cart and pony, her groom and lantern boy, had all vanished without a trace as if they had never existed.

As character witnesses, the Chinese were baffling. "The Princess' groom was a Manchu of good character," Volgorughi's Number One Boy told us. "But her lantern boy was a Cantonese with a great crime on his conscience. He caused his mother's death when he was born, which the Ancients always considered Unfilial."

At noon some of us met in the smoking room of the Pekin Club. "It's curious there's been no demand for ransom," I said.

"Bandits? Within the city walls?" Carstairs was sceptical. "Russia has never hesitated to use *agents provocateurs*. They say she's going to build a railway across Siberia. I don't believe it's practical. But you never can tell what those mad Russians will do. She'll need Manchuria. And she'll need a pretext for taking it. Why not the abduction of the Russian Minister's wife?"

Kiada shook his head. "Princess Volgorughi will not be found until 'The River' is restored to its companion pictures, 'The Lake,' 'The Sea' and 'The Cloud.'"

"What do you mean?"

Kiada answered me patiently as an adult explaining the obvious to a backward child. "It is known that Wang Wei painted this series of pictures entitled 'Four Forms of Water.' Volgorughi has only one of them—'The River.' The separation of one painting from others in a series divinely inspired is displeasing to the artist."

"But Wang Wei has been dead more than a thousand years!"

"It is always dangerous to displease those who have Passed Above. An artist as steeped in ancient mysteries as the pious Wang Wei has power over men long after he has become a Guest On High. Wang Wei will shape the course of our lives into any pattern he pleases in order to bring those four paintings together again. I knew this last night when I first saw 'The River' and—I was afraid."

"I wonder how Volgorughi did get that painting?" mused Carstairs. "I hope he didn't forget the little formality of payment."

"He's not a thief!" I protested.

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"No—but he's a collector. All collectors are mad. Especially Russian collectors. It's like gambling or opium."

Lucien smiled unpleasantly. "Art! Ghosts! Politics! Why go so far afield? Olga Kyrilovna was a young bride. And Volgorughi is—old. Such marriages are arranged by families, we all know. Women, as Balzac said, are the dupes of the social system. When they consent to marriage, they have not enough experience to know what they are consenting to. Olga Kyrilovna found herself in a trap. She had escaped, as young wives have escaped from time immemorial, by taking a lover. Now they've run off together. *Sabine a tout donné, sa beauté de colombe, et son amour . . .*"

"Monsieur de l'Orges."

We all started. Alexei was standing in the doorway. His eyes commanded the room. "What you say is impossible. Do I make myself clear?"

"Of course, Alexei. I—I was only joking." Lucien sounded piteous.

But Alexei had no pity. "A difference of taste in jokes has broken many friendships . . . Charley, will you come back to the Russian Legation with me?"

The Tartar General's audience hall had never seemed more shabby. Volgorughi sat staring at the garish wall of red and gilt. He was wearing an overcoat, carrying hat and gloves.

"News, Excellency?" queried Alexei.

Volgorughi shook his head without looking up. "I've been to the *Tsungli Yamen*." He spoke like a somnambulist. "The usual thing. Green tea. Melon seeds. A cold stone pavilion. Mandarins who giggle behind satin sleeves. I asked for an audience with the Emperor himself. It was offered—on the usual terms. I had to refuse—as usual. By the time a gunboat gets to the mouth of the Pei-ho, they may agree to open another seaport to Russian trade by way of reparation, but—I shall never see Olga Kyrilovna again. Sometimes I think our governments keep us here in the hope that something will happen to give them a pretext for sending troops into China . . ."

We all felt that. The *Tsungli Yamen*, or Foreign Office, calmly assumed that our legations were vassal missions to the Emperor, like those from Tibet. The Emperor would not receive us unless we acknowledged his sovereignty by kowtowing—the forehead to strike the floor audibly nine times.

Alexei was not a man to give up easily. "Excellency, I shall find her."

Volgorughi lifted his head. "How?"

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Alexei shouted. The study door opened. An old man in workman's dress came in with a young Chinese. I knew the old man as Antoine Billot, one of the Swiss clockmakers who were the only Western tradesmen allowed in Pekin.

"Charley," said Alexei, "tell Antoine about the fingering piece you saw in the hands of a beggar last summer."

"It was turquoise matrix, carved to represent two nude figures embracing. The vein of brown in the stone coloured their heads and spotted the back of the smaller figure."

"I have seen such a fingering piece," said Antoine. "In the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes. It is in that portion of the Chinese City known as the Graveyard of the Wu family, in the Lane of Azure Thunder."

"It is the Beileh Tsai Heng who lives there," put in Antoine's Chinese apprentice. "Often have we repaired his French clocks. Very fine clocks of Limoges enamel sent to the Emperor K'ang Hsi by Louis XIV. The Beileh's grandmother was the Discerning Concubine of the Emperor Tao Kwang."

"An old man?" asked Alexei.

"The Beileh has not yet attained the years of serenity. Though the name Heng means 'Steadfast,' he is impetuous as a startled dragon. He memorialised the late Emperor for permission to live in a secluded portion of the Chinese City so that he could devote his leisure to ingenious arts and pleasures."

I looked at Alexei. "You think the beggar who stared at us was a servant of this Prince?"

"No. Your beggar was the Prince himself. 'Elder Brother' is the correct form for addressing a Manchu prince of the third generation."

"It is the latest fad among our young princes of Pekin," explained the apprentice, "to haunt the highways and taverns dressed as beggars, sharing the sad life of the people for a few hours. They vie with each other to see which can look the most dirty and disreputable. But each one has some little habit of luxury that he cannot give up, even for the sake of disguise. A favourite ring, a precious fan, an antique fingering piece. That is how you can tell them from the real beggars."

Alexei turned to me. "When a taste for the exquisite becomes so refined that it recoils upon itself and turns into its opposite—a taste for the ugly—we call that decadence. Prince Heng is decadent—bored, curious, irresponsible, ever in search of a new sensation." Alexei turned back to the apprentice. "Could the Beileh be tempted with money?"

"Who could offer him anything he does not already

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possess?" intoned the young Chinese. "His revered father amassed one hundred thousand myriad snow-white taels of silver from unofficial sources during his benevolent reign as Governor of Kwantung. In the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes even the washbowls and spitting basins are curiously wrought of fine jade and pure gold, for this prince loves everything that is rare and strange."

Alexei hesitated before his next question. "Does the Beileh possess any valuable paintings?"

"His paintings are few but priceless. Four landscape scrolls from the divine brush of the illustrious Wang Wei."

Volgorughi started to his feet. "What's this?"

"You may go, Antoine." Alexei waited until the door had closed. "Isn't it obvious, sir? Your Wang Wei scroll was stolen."

Volgorughi sank back in his chair. "But—I bought it. From a peddler in the Chinese City. I didn't ask his name."

"How could a nameless peddler acquire such a painting from such a prince honestly?" argued Alexei. "Your peddler was a thief or a receiver. Such paintings have religious as well as artistic value to the Chinese. They are heirlooms, never sold even by private families who need the money. Last night the moment I saw the marginal note written by the Emperor Ch'ien Lung I knew the picture must have been stolen from the Imperial Collection. I was disturbed because I knew that meant trouble for us if it were known you had the painting. That's why I didn't want to read the inscription aloud. It's easy to see what happened. The thief was captured and tortured until he told Heng you had the painting. Heng saw Olga Kyrilovna with Charley and Lucien in the Chinese City last summer. He must have heard then that she was your wife. When he found you had the painting, he ordered her abduction. Now he is holding her as hostage for the return of the painting. All this cannot be coincidence."

Volgorughi buried his face in his hands. "What can we do?"

"With your permission, Excellency, I shall go into the Chinese City tonight and return the painting to Heng. I shall bring back Olga Kyrilovna—if she is still alive."

Volgorughi rose, shoulders bent, chin sunk on his chest. "I shall go with you, Alexei Andreitch."

"Your Excellency forgets that special circumstances make it possible for me to go into the Chinese City after dark when no other European can do so with safety. Alone, I have some

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chance of success. With you, it would be quite impossible."

"You will need a Cossack escort."

"That would strip the Legation of guards. And it would antagonise Heng. Olga Kyrilovna might be harmed before I could reach her. I prefer to go alone."

Volgorughi sighed. "Report to me as soon as you get back. . . . You are waiting for something?"

"The painting, Excellency."

Volgorughi walked with a shuffling step into the study. He came back with the scroll in its case. "Take it. I never want to see it again."

At the door I looked back. Volgorughi was slumped in his seat, a figure of utter loneliness and despair.

Alexei glanced at me as we crossed the compound. "Something is puzzling you, Charley. What is it?"

"If this Beileh Heng is holding Olga Kyrilovna as a hostage for the painting, he wants you to know that he has abducted her. He has nothing to conceal. Then why was the leper murdered if not to conceal something?"

Alexei led the way into a room of his own furnished with military severity. "I'm glad Volgorughi didn't think of that question, Charley. It has been troubling me, too."

"And the answer?"

"Perhaps I shall find it in the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes. Perhaps it will lead me back to one of the men who dined with us yesterday evening. Except for the Carstairs', we were all separated from each other at one time or another in those dark streets—even you and I . . ."

Alexei was opening a cedar chest. He took out a magnificent robe of wadded satin in prismatic blues and greens. When he had slipped it on he turned to face me. The Tartar cast of his oblique eyes and sallow skin was more pronounced than I had ever realised.

He smiled. "Now will you believe I have the blood of Temudjin Genghis Khan in my veins?"

"You've done this before!"

His smile grew sardonic. "Do you understand why I am the only European who can go into the Chinese City after dark?"

My response was utterly illogical. "Alexei, take me with you tonight!"

He studied my face. "You were fond of Olga Kyrilovna, weren't you?"

"Is there no way?" I begged.

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"Only one way. And it's not safe. You could wear the overalls of a workman and carry the tools of a clockmaker. And stay close to me, ostensibly your Chinese employer."

"If Antoine Billot will lend me his clothes and tools . . ."

"That can be arranged." Alexei was fitting a jewelled nail shield over his little finger.

"Well? Is there any other objection?"

"Only this." He looked up at me intently. His pale face and black eyes were striking against the kingfisher blues and greens of his satin robe. "We are going to find something ugly at the core of this business, Charley. You are younger than I and—will you forgive me if I say you are rather innocent? Your idea of life in Pekin is a series of dances and dinners, race meetings outside the walls in spring, charades at the English Legation in winter, snipe-shooting at Hai Ten in the fall. Your government doesn't maintain an Intelligence Service here. So you can have no idea of the struggle that goes on under the surface of this pleasant social life. Imperialist ambitions and intrigues, the alliance between politics and trade, even the opium trade—what do you know of all that? Sometimes I think you don't even know much about the amusements men like Lucien find in the Chinese City . . . Life is only pleasant on the surface, Charley. And now we're going below the surface. Whatever happens tonight, I want you to remember this: under every suit of clothes, broadcloth or rags, there is the same sort of animal."

"What are you hinting at?"

"There are various possibilities. You said Heng stared at your party as if he had never seen Western men before. Are you sure he wasn't staring at Olga Kyrilovna as if he had never seen a Western woman before?"

"But our women are physically repulsive to Chinese!"

"In most cases. But the Chinese are not animated types. They are individuals, as we are. Taste is subjective and arbitrary. Individual taste can be eccentric. Isn't it possible that there are among them, as among us, men who have romantic fancies for the exotic? Or sensual fancies for the experimental? I cannot get those words of Antoine's apprentice out of my mind: *this prince loves everything that is rare and strange . . .*"

A red sun was dipping behind the Western Hills when we passed out of a southern gate of the Tartar City. In a moment all nine gates would swing shut and we would be

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locked out of our legations until tomorrow's dawn. It was not a pleasant feeling. I had seen the head of a consul rot on a pike in the sun. That was what happened to barbarian demons who went where they were not wanted outside the Treaty Ports.

The Chinese City was a wilderness of twisting lanes, shops, taverns, theatres, tea houses, opium dens and brothels. Long ago, conquering Manchu Tartars had driven conquered Chinese outside the walls of Pekin proper, or the Tartar City, to this sprawling suburb where the conquered catered to the corruption of the conqueror. The Chinese City came to life at nightfall when the Tartar City slept behind its walls.

Alexei seemed to know every turn of the way. At last I saw why he was Russian Military Attaché at Pekin. Who else would learn so much about China and its people as this bold adventurer who could pass for a Manchu in Chinese robes? When we were snipe-shooting together, he seemed to know the Pei-chih-li Plain as if he carried a military map of the district in his head. Years afterwards, when the Tsar's men took Port Arthur, everyone learned about Russian Intelligence in China. I learned that evening. And I found myself looking at Alexei in his Chinese dress as if he had suddenly become a stranger. What did I know of this man whom I had met so casually at legation parties? Was he ruthless enough to stab a beggar already dying of leprosy? Had he had any reason for doing so?

We turned into a narrower lane—a mere crack between high walls. Alexei whispered, "The Lane of Azure Thunder."

A green-tiled roof above the dun-coloured wall proclaimed the dwelling of a prince. Alexei paused before a gate painted vermilion. He spoke Cantonese to the gate-keeper. I understood only two words—"Wang Wei." There were some moments of waiting. Then the gate creaked open and we were ushered through that drab wall into a wonderland of fantastic parks and lacquered pavilions blooming with all the colours of Sung porcelain.

I was unprepared for the splendour of the audience hall. The old palaces we rented for legations were melancholy places, decaying and abandoned by their owners. But here rose, green and gold rioted against a background of dull ebony panels, tortured by a cunning chisel into grotesquely writhing shapes. There were hangings of salmon satin embroidered with threads of gold and pale green, images of birds and flowers carved in jade and coral and malachite. There

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was a rich rustle of satin and the Beileh Heng walked slowly into the room.

Could this stately figure be the same rude fellow I had last seen squatting in the gutter, half naked, in the rags of a beggar? He moved with the deliberate grace of the grave religious dancers in the Confucian temples. His robe was lustrous purple—the "myrtle-red" prescribed for princes of the third generation by the Board of Rites. It swung below the paler mandarin jacket in sculptured folds, stiff with a sable lining revealed by two slits at either side. Watered in the satin were the Eight Famous Horses of the Emperor Mu Wang galloping over the Waves of Eternity. His cuffs were curved like horseshoes in honour of the cavalry that set the Manchu Tartars on the throne. Had that cavalry ridden west instead of south, Alexei himself might have owed allegiance to this prince. Though one was Chinese and one Russian, both were Tartar.

Heng's boots of purple satin looked Russian. So did his round cap faced with a band of sable. His skin was a dull ivory, not as yellow as the southern Chinese. His cheeks were lean; his glance searching and hungry. He looked like a pure-bred descendant of the "wolf-eyed, lantern-jawed Manchus" of the Chinese chronicles. A conqueror who would take whatever he wanted, but who had learned from the conquered Chinese to want only the precious and fanciful...

Something else caught my eye. There was no mistake. This was the beggar. For pale against his purple robe gleamed the fingering piece of turquoise matrix which his thin, neurotic fingers caressed incessantly.

No ceremonial tea was served. We were being received as enemies during a truce. But Alexei bowed profoundly and spoke with all the roundabout extravagance of mandarin politeness.

"An obscure design of Destiny has brought the property of your Highness—a venerable landscape scroll painted by the devout Wang Wei—into the custody of the Russian Minister. Though I appear Chinese in this garb, know that I am Russian and my minister has sent me in all haste and humility to restore this inestimable masterpiece to its rightful owner."

Heng's eyes were fixed on a point above our heads for, Chinese or barbarian, we were inferiors, unworthy of his gaze. His lips scarcely moved. "When you have produced the scroll, I shall know whether you speak truth or falsehood."

"Your Highness' words are unspotted pearls of perpetual

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wisdom." Alexei stripped off the embroidered case from the jade roller. Like a living thing, the painted silk slipped out of his grasp and unwound itself at the Beileh's feet.

Once again a faery stream of lapis, jade and turquoise hues unrolled before my enchanted eyes. Kiada was right. I could hear the wind sing in the rushes and the wail of the wild geese, faint and far, a vibration trembling on the outer edge of the physical threshold of sound.

The hand that held the fingering piece was suddenly still. Only the Beileh's eyeballs moved, following the course of Wang Wei's river from its bubbling spring to its foam-flecked sea. Under his cultivated stolidity, I saw fear and, more strangely, sorrow.

At last he spoke. "This painting I inherited from my august ancestor, the ever glorious Emperor Ch'ien Lung, who left his words and seal upon the margin. How has it come into your possession?"

Alexei bowed again. "I shall be grateful for an opportunity to answer that question if your Highness will first condescend to explain to my mean intelligence how the scroll came to leave the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes?"

"Outside Barbarian, you are treading on a tiger's tail when you speak with such insolence to an Imperial Clansman. I try to make allowances for you because you come of an inferior race, the Hairy Ones, without manners or music, unversed in the Six Fine Arts and the Five Classics. Know then that it is not your place to ask questions or mine to answer them. You may follow me, at a distance of nine paces, for I have something to show you."

He looked neither to right nor left as he walked soberly through the audience hall, his hands tucked inside his sleeves. At the door he lifted one hand to loosen the clasp of his mandarin jacket, and it slid from his shoulders. Before it had time to touch the ground, an officer of the Coral Button sprang out of the shadows to catch it reverently. The Beileh did not appear conscious of this officer's presence. Yet he had let the jacket fall without an instant's hesitation.

We followed him into a garden, black and white in the moonlight. We passed a pool spanned by a crescent bridge. Its arc of stone matched the arc of its reflection in the ice-coated water, completing a circle that was half reality, half illusion. We came to another pavilion, its roof curling up at each corner, light filtering through its doorway. Again we heard the shrill plaint of a guitar. We rounded a devil-screen

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of gold lacquer and the thin sound ended on a high, feline note.

I blinked against a blaze of lights. Like a flight of parti-coloured butterflies, a crowd of girls fluttered away from us, tottering on tiny, mutilated feet. One who sat apart from the rest rose with dignity. A Manchu princess, as I saw by her unbound feet and undaunted eyes. Her hair was piled high in the lacquered coils of the Back Cloud Coiffure. She wore hairpins, ear-rings, bracelets and tall heels of acid-green jade. Her gown of sea-green silk was sewn with silver thread worked in the Pekin stitch to represent the Silver Crested Love Birds of Conjugal Peace. But when she turned her face, I saw the sour lines and sagging pouches of middle age.

Princess Heng's gaze slid over us with subtle contempt and came to rest upon the Beileh with irony. "My pleasure in receiving you is boundless and would find suitable expression in appropriate compliments were the occasion more auspicious. As it is, I pray you will forgive me if I do not linger in the fragrant groves of polite dalliance, but merely inquire why your Highness has seen fit to introduce two male strangers, one a barbarian, into the sanctity of the Inner Chamber?"

Heng answered impassively. "Even the Holy Duke of Yen neglected the forms of courtesy when pursued by a tiger."

A glint of malice sparkled in the eyes of the Beileh's Principal Old Woman. "Your Highness finds his present situation equivalent to being pursued by a tiger? To my inadequate understanding that appears the natural consequence of departing from established custom by attempting to introduce a barbarian woman into the Inner Chamber."

Heng sighed. "If the presence of these far-travelled strangers distresses you and my Small Old Women you have permission to retire."

Princess Heng's jade bangles clashed with the chilly ring of ice in a glass as she moved towards the door. The Small Old Women, all girls in their teens, shimmered and rustled after the Manchu princess, who despised them both as concubines and as Chinese.

Heng led us through another door.

"Olga!"

The passion in Alexei's voice was a shock to me. In my presence he had always addressed her as "Excellency" or "Princess."

She might have been asleep as she lay there on her blue fox

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cloak, her eyes closed, her pale face at peace, her slight hands relaxed in the folds of her white tulle skirt. But the touch of her hands was ice and faintly from her parted lips came the sweet sickish odour of opium.

Alexei turned on Heng. "If you had not stolen her, she would not have died!"

"Stolen?" It was the first word that had pierced Heng's reserve. "Imperial Clansmen do not steal women. I saw this far-travelled woman in a market lane of the Chinese City last summer. I coveted her. But I did not steal her. I offered money for her, decently and honourably, in accord with precepts of morality laid down by the Ancients. Money was refused. Months passed. I could not forget the woman with faded eyes. I offered one of my most precious possessions. It was accepted. The painting was her price. But the other did not keep his side of the bargain. For she was dead when I lifted her out of the cart."

The lights were spinning before my eyes. "Alexei, what is this? Volgorughi would not..."

Alexei's look stopped me.

"You..." Words tumbled from my lips. "There was a lover. And you were he. And Volgorughi found out. And he watched you together and bided his time, nursing his hatred and planning his revenge like a work of art. And finally he punished you both cruelly by selling her to Heng.

"Volgorughi knew that Olga would drive alone last night. Volgorughi had lived so long in the East that he had absorbed the Eastern idea of women as well as the Eastern taste in painting. The opium must have been in the sherry he gave her. She was already drowsy when he lifted her into the cart. No doubt he had planned to give her only a soporific dose that would facilitate her abduction. But at the last moment he commuted her sentence to death and let her have the full, lethal dose. He bade her goodbye tenderly because he knew he would never see her again. He promised her she would be safe because death is, in one sense, safety—the negation of pain, fear and struggle...

"There was no peddler who sold him the painting. That was his only lie. He didn't prevent your coming here tonight because he wanted you to know. That was your punishment. And he saw that you could make no use of your knowledge now. Who will believe that Olga Kyrilovna, dead of a Chinese poison in the Chinese City, was killed by her own husband? Some Chinese will be suspected—Heng himself, or

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his jealous wife, or the men who carry out his orders. No European would take Heng's story seriously unless it were supported by at least one disinterested witness. That was why the leper had to die last night, while Volgorughi was separated from Lucien through a wrong turning that was Volgorughi's fault. The leper must have overheard some word of warning or instruction from Volgorughi to Olga's lantern boy that revealed the whole secret. That word was spoken in Cantonese. Olga's lantern boy was Cantonese. Volgorughi spoke that dialect. The leper knew no other tongue. And Lucien, the only person who walked with Volgorughi, was as ignorant of Cantonese as all the rest of us, save you."

Heng spoke sadly in his own tongue. "The treachery of the Russian Minister in sending this woman to me—dead—deserves vengeance. But one thing induces me to spare him. He did not act by his own volition. He was a blind tool in the skilful hand of the merciless Wang Wei. Through this woman's death 'The River' has been restored to its companion pictures, 'The Lake,' 'The Sea' and 'The Cloud.' And I, who separated the pictures so impiously, have had my own share of suffering as a punishment..."

Olga was buried in the Russian Orthodox cemetery at Pekin. Volgorughi was recalled. The breath of scandal clung to his name the rest of his life. The Boxer Uprising finally gave the West its pretext for sending troops into China. That purple-satin epicurean, the Beileh Heng, was forced to clean sewers by German troops during the occupation and committed suicide from mortification. The gay young bloods of Pekin who had amused themselves by playing beggars found themselves beggars in earnest when the looting was over.

Alexei? He became attentive to the wife of the new French Minister, a woman with dyed hair who kept a Pekinese sleeve dog in her bedroom.

The scroll? Any good reference book will tell you that there are no Wang Wei scrolls in existence today, though there are some admirable copies. One, by Chao Meng fu, in the British Museum, shows the course of a river. Scholars have described this copy in almost the same words I have used tonight to describe the original. But they are not the same. I went to see the copy. I was disappointed. I could no longer hear the song of the wind in the rushes or the wail of the wild geese.

Was the change in the painting? Or in me?

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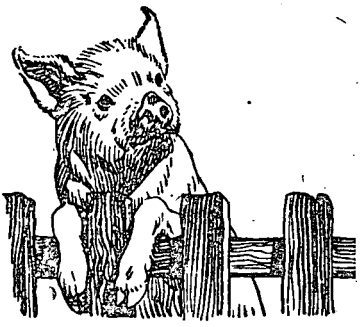

spiriting of SHEBA

by BERNARD WILLIAMS

THE gates of Heaven were finally opened to Evans-the-Post's satisfaction. He nodded approval, and the tenors sat down quickly. Bengie-Black-Lion beat most of them to it, wiping his forehead as he went. Warm work, Eisteddfod practices, and more forehead every year.

Evans tapped, *staccato*, on his music stand, and glared round at them all. Wonderful the difference a baton could make to a man. Tomorrow he'd sell you a ha'penny stamp, mild as milk, but tonight he was like a bear. Even the sopranos stopped rustling, ready for the climax to the piece—Huw and Blodwen's duet sequence.

Bengie beat time silently with one foot as the piano tinkled the introduction. Farther along the row, he could feel Huw-the-Meat getting to his feet.

Darro, the boy could sing. Like Golden Syrup it was—out of the strong came forth sweetness. But now for it. Evans' pencil was beating out, savagely, the last bar of Huw's opening, then stabbing towards the soprano.

Blodwen faltered, as usual, and came in half a beat late. The nearer the Eisteddfod came, the worse she was getting. Everything ground to a halt. Evans looked at the ceiling, and Blodwen looked crestfallen, as usual. But there was another look in her eyes as well, tonight.

"It's no use, I can't do it. I didn't want the part in the first place, you know that, Mr. Evans. You'll just have to get someone else!" And she was gone, heels twinkling through the vestry door before anyone could speak.

Suddenly Evans was looking as though he were back among his stamps. "Three weeks! That's all we've got before the

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Eisteddfod—and no soprano for the duet. We might as well hand back the Silver Cup tonight. We haven't got a hope!"

Then everybody was giving advice, except the sopranos, who were just as busy not catching Evans' eye. They were none of them up to Eisteddfod duet standard, and they knew it. So did Evans, but it looked like being any port in a storm.

Bengie slipped out quietly. There'd be no more practice tonight. He might as well give Bessie a rest from the bar back home at the Black Lion. Not that she'd have been rushed off her feet, with nearly everybody up at the practice.

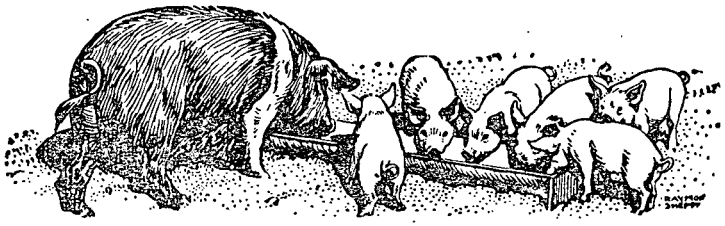
He was halfway down the village street when he heard the singing. A lullaby it was, an old Welsh cradle song he remembered from his mother's knee. Funny how a song could roll back the years. Bengie could almost hear the rustle of his mother's skirts as she dandled him to and fro. Pity they didn't broadcast some of those good old songs a bit more often. And a pity they didn't have just one soprano in the village with a voice like that, to match young Huw's tenor.

Then he realised with a start that this was no broadcast. The singing was coming from the yard of White Gate. The smallholding had been empty for months, but there had been great comings and goings all day as the new owner's furniture and stock were moved in.

The singing was growing plainer all the time as Bengie approached. He remembered the gossip in the bar on the sale day—that the man who'd made the final bid for White Gate was only an agent. Acting for a young woman, they said. Maybe the gossips were right for once. And a young woman who could sing? The answer to old Evans' prayer!

The singing was still going strong, punctuated now and then by the clank of a pail and the twinkling of a light. Trying to put her stock at ease in their new cots and sties, no doubt.

Bengie walked straight past the Black Lion. Bessie'd have to manage on her own a bit longer. He could feel all the zeal of the talent scout waking inside him. Nothing like striking



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while the iron was hot, before this girl was nobbled by their rivals at Pen-y-bont. That Silver Cup only had to stay one more winter in the bar parlour, then it would belong to the village for good.

She was leaning on the pig-sty wall—when he reached the big white gate—and was serenading the pigs. Bengie could hear satisfied grunts as they mopped up their swill. The gate creaked as he touched it, and the singing stopped.

"Who's there?"

A nice speaking voice too. Young and firm.

"Can I come in?" Bengie stepped into the circle of light. "I'm Bengie," he nodded towards the black shadow of the pub, "your neighbour. What about coming in and joining us for a bite of supper when you've finished up? No doubt you're still in a bit of a muddle, but it'll give you a chance to get to know us."

Her smile was warm and friendly, with a hint of roguishness.

"You're very kind, Mr. Bevan. But I really think you should have asked your wife first, instead of coming straight here from the practice!"

Bengie gaped. Then she laughed; a young, musical laugh that made him wish he was thirty years younger.

"It's all right, Mr. Bevan. I don't tell fortunes. But your wife invited me round to supper an hour ago, and she told me where you were."

They laughed together like old friends, and their laughter brought a fat porker to the gate of the sty, to stare at them inquisitively. Bengie's intriguing new neighbour held out her hand.

"I'm Megan, Megan Jones." She tapped the curious pig lightly on the nose, "and this is Sheba."

Bengie was delighted to discover, over supper, that Megan had been a choir member in her previous home. She was familiar with the piece the choir were practising, and had even taken the soprano part in the duet. For once Bengie blessed all Eisteddfod committees for being great stick-in-the-muds when it came to choosing set pieces for the choirs.

Evans had hardly had time to unlock the post office door in the morning, before an excited Bengie was banging on the counter.

"You can call another practice for tomorrow night, Evans bach. I've found you another soprano for the duet!"

The practice was Bengie's hour of triumph. Even the

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sopranos were too relieved to be jealous. And when the moment came for Megan to sing opposite Huw, it was obvious that she knew what she was about. Her clear, sweet voice came in firmly on the right beat, an awkward opening for any novice. And the way in which the two young voices blended brought tears of joy to old Evans' eyes.

"Why, boys bach," he said when they had finished, "the Cup is as good as in the bag!"

And Bengie was smiling from ear to ear.

At every practice the harmony seemed to grow better. And Huw looked more alive than he'd ever done. He'd been a bachelor long enough. Time something happened to put some spark into him.

The Black Lion was strategically placed between White Gate and the little butcher's shop tacked on to Huw's rambling, dust-laden, bachelor's house. And there was a twinkle in Bengie's eye as he noticed that Megan made more calls at the shop than would seem strictly necessary, and stayed longer than it takes to buy one chop.

He was pottering in the garden behind the pub on the Monday afternoon before the Eisteddfod, when he heard Megan—singing as she went—paying one of her visits to the butcher. No clang from the rusty old bell on the door meant that she'd got no answer at the shop. Monday was Huw's day for the weekly cattle market at Pen-y-bont. He could hardly be home yet. Bengie was on his way to the fence to tell Megan so, when he heard her calling from somewhere among the shamble of sheds behind the shop.

"Hu——w! Hello! Anyone at home?"

There was a peculiar squeal of recognition from one of the sheds. Peering through the fence, Bengie could see that Megan had heard it too, and was going to investigate.

She fumbled with the catch of a tumbledown shed at the side of the yard. The moment the door was free, out burst a large porker, who began delightedly nuzzling around Megan's Wellingtons. It was obviously Sheba.

Then suddenly Huw was on the scene, appearing from somewhere at the rear of the sheds.

"What the—! Oh, it's you, Megan. Has that blessed pig managed to break out? I had enough trouble getting her home from market. The sooner she's pork, the better!"

"Pork? Oh, Huw, you couldn't!"

"Megan bach, you can't have pork without killing pigs. What do you suppose I bought her for?"

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"Oh, but not my Sheba! Before I let him take her this morning, I made the dealer promise he'd only sell her for breeding, and not to a butcher. Just wait till he calls again!"

She patted the pig affectionately on the head. "I couldn't bear to watch him put you on his lorry this morning, Sheba bach. I nearly kept you back, and just sent the others. You're such a pet!"

Sheba sat down contentedly, snuggling against Megan's feet like an overgrown sheepdog.

Huw was scornful. "Pet! Nonsense, girl. Nice bit of pork there. Best in the market this morning. If you reared her, you ought to be proud of yourself. Tell you what, I'll bring you down a nice couple of chops on Friday—free sample like."

He laughed at his own joke as he pushed the protesting Sheba back into her shed, and shut the door firmly behind her.

But Megan wasn't laughing. She was looking at where the tip of Sheba's nose showed through the crack in the door, and thinking of the chopping-block.

"You can't do it, Huw. Not now she's seen me again. She thinks she's safe. You'll have to sell her back to me."

Huw was suddenly serious. "I can't do that, Megan bach. Some of my best customers have ordered pork for next week-end, and pork they'll have to have. I can't get another pig now, with the market over for the week, so pork she'll have to be."

He tried to put a hand on Megan's shoulders, to bring her round. She twisted away angrily.

"Is that your last word, Huw Morgan?"

"But, Megan bach, business is business. If my customers ask for pork and I can't give it to them, they'll soon go slipping off to Pen-y-bont for their bit of meat. And what do you want with a great big pig that's getting too fat for her sty?"

Twisting angrily on her heel, without another word, Megan was gone.

That night the choir was in fine fettle, but the duet was a very wooden affair. Megan didn't even glance in Huw's direction.

"Nerves," said Evans. "That's all it is. Come round again tomorrow night, you two, and we'll have a little special practice just to round things off a bit."

But Tuesday brought no improvement. If anything it was worse, with Megan singing as though she'd never even heard the piece before.

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Evans' dreams of the Silver Cup were fading rapidly.

"Whatever's the matter, Megan bach?"

Megan smiled faintly. "It's nothing really, Mr. Evans. I'll be all right by Friday."

But Bengie, sitting quietly out of sight in the vestry, knew that wild horses wouldn't have dragged the real answer out of her. She was pining for her pet pig.

All the way back to the pub Bengie pondered the problem. Properly upset about that pig, Megan was. And Huw, he was as stubborn as the donkeys his old man used to sell for beef in the Depression. But there must be a way out.

It was nearly closing time when the great idea came. Suddenly Bengie handed over the bar to Bessie, and went down to the cellar. He reappeared and was mysteriously busy in the scullery. Then, at the last moment, he showed himself in the connecting doorway and beckoned three of his cronies through into the kitchen.

They trooped in: Jenkins-Big-House first, with his quarter-inch of Player's, and the two Thomas boys from Ty-Gwyn, with straw sticking out of their Wellingtons.

Bengie was enthroned at the head of the table. Four glasses stood on it, and a bottle of Scotch. They knew the signs, and sat round without a word. Bengie poured before speaking.

"Boys, the honour of the village is at stake. Without your help, the choir is going to lose the Silver Cup on Friday night."

A belly laugh from Jenkins startled the cat off the settle. Even the Thomas boys almost smiled.

"Come off it, Bengie. You know that even the Supporters' Club has stopped us singing at the rugby matches. We were upsetting our boys just as much as the visitors."

"I'm not asking you to sing. All you have to do is steal a pig."

The three chairs scraped back as one.

Jenkins finished his Scotch standing up. "Thanks for the drink, Bengie. We'll see you again."

"Oh. come on now, boys. You can't let me down. Think of the parlour without the Silver Cup, and old Evans with a broken heart!"

"Aye, and think of Big House without old Jenkins!"

"There'll be no mistakes. I'll be there all the time to help you. Come on now, boys, and help me finish this bottle. Good stuff, it is. Been in the cellar five years."

He poured himself a good one, then slowly filled up the other

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glasses. Reluctantly, the trio joined him. Bengie explained the importance of the rescue operation. "It's got to be done tonight, or the pig'll be hanging in the shop tomorrow. And we'll have to make it look as though she's broken out and just strayed back home. Huw wouldn't have the face to fetch her back from there, and even if he tried, I think Megan would win on her own ground. Got the right stuff in her, that one."

Jenkins looked scornful. "And how are we going to kidnap this hungry pig in the middle of the night, without waking the dead in Bethesda graveyard?"

Bengie disappeared into the scullery, coming back with a pail of steaming mash.

"Hungry is the word, Jenkins bach. Thirsty, too, I shouldn't wonder." And he produced another full bottle of Scotch from the dresser, and poured it steadily into the pail...

Huw's light had been out an hour before they tiptoed round to the sty. Bengie opened the door a crack, and slipped in the pail. They held their breath. But Sheba's nose was in better trim than her eyes, and she made short work of the mash. Then she hiccuped once or twice politely, smiled at them sweetly, and went out like a light.

A leg apiece, they carried her gently out of the sty, leaving the door ajar...

In the morning, Bengie's eye was glued to the crack in the fence as Megan made her round of the sheds and sties. She managed a song, a mournful ballad of lost and hopeless love, sung *pianissimo*. But it was just loud enough to pierce the alcoholic mists still enveloping Sheba.

She opened one eye, then gave a joyful squeal of recognition at her own sty and her mistress' voice. She ambled to the open door of the sty as Megan rushed across the yard, and there was a duet of rapture.

Bengie was turning away, well satisfied, when he heard other, heavier footsteps in the yard. In a second, his eye was back at the crack. Yes, it was Huw, bearing down on the rapturous pair by the sty... He'd obviously discovered his loss early. Now for it! But Huw was actually smiling.

"Was it a nice surprise, Megan bach? I couldn't bear to see you so unhappy, so I brought her back to you in the night." Bengie almost choked behind the fence.

But Megan's arms were around Huw's neck. "Oh, Huw, you're an angel! I knew you couldn't be as cruel as you pretended to be. I could kiss you for this!"

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Huw was obviously going to make the most of it.

"Well, take me into the house and do it properly then. It's a bit too public out here, and I've something very private to say to you. You don't know this village yet, Megan bach. Even the fences here have ears!" And he gave the fence a playful kick with his size tens as they walked to the house.

Bengie had to stand in the back row of the tenors on the night of the Eisteddfod, to hide the black eye he got from the loose paling. But it was all worth it, he thought, as he polished up the Cup, before putting it back in its case in the bar parlour.

And of course, weddings were always good for trade . . .

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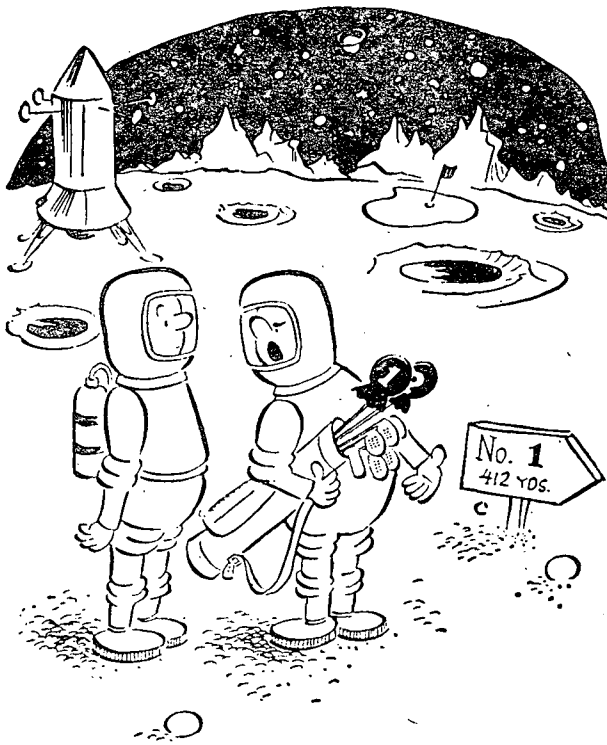

"'Bring your clubs,' I said. But would you listen to me? No!"

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THE THOUSAND

WARREN Stone had fought like a cornered animal, not merely trying to stay alive and unhurt, but wanting to kill the two men he knew only as the totem-pole and the loden coat, to grind their faces into the earth, especially when they had threatened Eleanor.

Stone looked at Eleanor Hvar, pale, except where the totem-pole's fingermarks were still red on her face. Their eyes caught and held. Stone put his arm around her shoulders, but she shrugged it off. He did not touch her again.

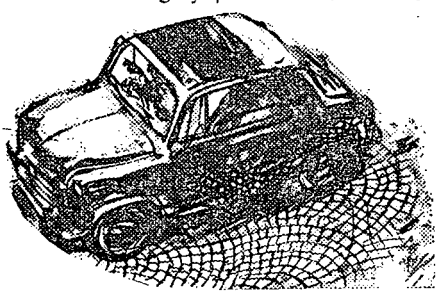
By the drawbridge, where they had fought, Stone found the loden coat's briefcase lying in the path. He picked it up and tried to open it, but the catch still stuck. It had probably saved his life, perhaps their lives. He patted the heavy brown bag as if it were a dog. He was sure there were guns inside. But, as he carried it down from Kalemegdan, he remembered how light it had seemed when, using it as a weapon, he had hurled it at the totem-pole.

They found a taxi at the Barjakli Mosque, at the foot of its Oriental minaret, which seemed like a cautioning finger in the night sky. They were silent driving to Eleanor Hvar's house. Stone helped her out of the cab, and as he was about to get in again to go back to his hotel, she held him by his coat sleeve.

"Don't go," she said, "please don't go."

Stone paid the cab driver and watched him drive off down the street. Then he followed Eleanor Hvar through the gate and into the house. In the living room, with only one small lamp lit, they sat and smoked. Stone stared at the bronze on the desk... This figure was the strangely powerful bronze of

Part Two of Argosy's serial—a novel of murder and suspense. New readers, turn overleaf for synopsis



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DOORS

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which Eleanor Hvar had said, "That man was not afraid—he was my husband, Mirko Sutnjak. He's dead. I have used my own name for a long time." The figure was hollow where, in her words, "there should be heart and hope." Despair, outrage and helplessness were instinct in the distorted wrists . . .

When the totem-pole attacked Eleanor Hvar, Stone's feeling for the dark, sombre-faced woman, who now sat absent-eyed across from him, had come swiftly to the surface with the encounter. Was it because she had fought fiercely too, and on his behalf? He had put his arm around her in a way he knew was not casual and she had known too and shrugged it off.

She left the room and came back with a whisky bottle and glasses. After she had poured stiff drinks, she raised her glass to him and said, with a sincerity that could only be borne because it was so acidly etched with self-mockery, "Thank you, Mr. Stone, for saving my life."

"It was nothing, Miss Hvar," he said, taking the same tone, "fair maidens in distress are my speciality."

"They are?"

"They are, but I do *not* seem to be theirs."

She turned her face half away and drank her drink, and he followed suit. Back in her chair, she carefully arranged her legs and skirt, and lighted a new cigarette.

"Who were they, Mr. Stone? What did they want?" Eleanor Hvar asked.

He remembered the advice that Maxim Grout, the economic counsellor at the American Embassy, had given him. Grout had taught him a lesson again that in the past he had learned often and more often disregarded. *Be wary!* Who was Eleanor Hvar? What did he know of her except that he was instinctively drawn to her and wanted to trust her? All the more reason, then, for not doing so. That was undoubtedly part of her job, to be warm and attractive enough to invite confidence. But who did she work for and what were her allegiances?

Carefully, Stone gave Eleanor Hvar an edited account of Antun Vuk's murder: of his waking realisation last night in his Belgrade hotel room of the shadowy figure of the totem-pole—the murderer of the boy, Antun Vuk. He spoke of Decani's brutality to the apparently innocent chambermaid, and described how he had later seen the totem-pole in Decani's building: that afternoon Stone had been followed to her house by the loden coat. But Stone eliminated everything

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◆ The story so far: Warren Stone, American literary agent, is in Yugoslavia to find new authors. In his Belgrade hotel room, he is awakened by a young boy who whispers, "I bring you... from Master Karst." He then falls dead, but not before Stone glimpses the murderer—a tall totem-pole figure.

Konstantin Karst, ex-Vice President, ex-Party Leader, ex-Communist, is thought to have written a searing criticism of the Party. To kill him would make him a martyr but so would the publication of the manuscript. The regime must prevent this. Stone is suspect—believed to be after it; Dr. Petar Decani of the Secret Police, Eleanor Hvar (Stone's interpreter), Michael Townsend, US attaché and the enigmatic Max Grout are each planning to use Stone to get the Karst writings.

Enmeshed in this web of murder and intrigue, Stone and Eleanor have to fight off an attack by a man in a loden coat, assisted by the totem-pole who warns, "I will kill you next time, Mr. Stone."

about Konstantin Karst—about Karst's note brought by Antun Vuk and hidden in Stone's slipper. He did not tell her that the boy's last whispered words had been, "I bring you the thing from Master Karst, but someone follows," seconds only before the kneeling body of the dead boy, Karst's nephew, lay sprawled across Stone's bed.

"Probably," Stone concluded, "these two men, the totem-pole and the loden coat, work for Doctor Decani. He is obviously in the top strata of the secret police."

"No," she said, "I don't think so."

"Why? Because they tried to kill you, too?" Stone asked.

"And what do you mean by that, Mr. Stone?"

"That you must work with or for Doctor Decani, Miss Hvar," Stone replied. "You're the first person with whom he makes an appointment for me. You're the foremost translator of English and American books in the country, he tells me, and it seems obvious that you are to be—how shall I put it?—my literary watchdog."

"Not a very flattering figure of speech. I have been called a bitch before, Mr. Stone, but never in quite that way," she said, solemn and sardonic. "But if *they* work for Doctor Decani, and so do I, why should they try to kill me?"

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Stone threw up his hands. "Who knows? I don't. A bluff, an act maybe, to make me think so and trust you. Perhaps, they were even willing . . ." He stopped.

". . . to sacrifice me?" she finished the sentence for him.

"Look," he said, "I don't think they wanted to kill either of us. At least not to begin with, but I think matters got out of hand. If they'd been hidden, or even careful, I wouldn't have noticed them. But they deliberately made a show."

"Then what *did* they want?"

"To scare me, I think. I'm not sure."

"Are you scared, Mr. Stone?"

"Certainly. Shouldn't I be?"

"You didn't fight as if you were afraid." Her admiration was clear, if reluctantly tendered.

"You fought a good fight yourself," Stone returned the compliment. Then he went on. "Some kinds of fear make you fight better, the fear of disgracing yourself by cowardice, for instance. I was afraid every minute. Especially when it looked as if you would be knocked off that drawbridge."

"That's very gallant," she murmured.

"No, not gallant. I felt that it was my fault that you were there and that it would have been my responsibility."

"Even if I was in Doctor Decani's employ and therefore, as his mion, was with you on *his* initiative?" Her harsh laughter grated. "You're so old-fashioned, Mr. Stone."

"Is that what it is?"

"This is the Balkans," she rasped. "We don't reserve killing only for men. We kill men, women and children. And men, women and children kill. We've even been known to kill the unborn."

"The Balkans are not alone in any of that," Stone retorted sharply. He drank, and the whisky plunged hotly to the pit of his stomach. Fatigue overpowered him, and his head seemed suddenly a foreign weight, too heavy for his neck. He leaned forward, letting his face fall into his hands.

Stone heard her get up and go to the desk. The receiver clicked, a dial tone whined, then the paced sounds of dialling staccato-ed in the silent room. He recognised only the words *Doctor Decani* and *Petar* a few moments apart, the rest was a blur of foreign language, but he did not lift his head to look at her; he didn't even listen. When her perfume, warmed and chastened by the smell of her clothes and body, enveloped him, he knew she had finished talking and was close. Hesitantly, her hands touched his hair, then strong fingers kneaded

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the back of his neck. "I called Decani—" she seemed to be talking from a great distance and so softly that he had to strain to hear—"I told him what happened at Kalemegdan. Those were *not* his men. I described them and told him where you had seen the tall, thin one. He said he didn't know who they were, but he would find out."

The fingers paused, then skilfully began to massage his shoulders, loosening tightened knots of muscle. "You have your appointment with Karst tomorrow," she said after a while, so coolly indifferent that he knew it was important. The massaging stopped, and Stone waited for what he knew was coming. First, her fingers began their healing probing once again, then her voice was like a caress, "Why don't you go to see him—" there was only the slightest groping for his own name—"Warren. Get Karst's manuscript and then give it to me?"

"Manuscript?" He was so tired and disappointed, it wasn't even difficult to feign. "Has Karst got a manuscript?"

She handed him a small slip of paper with an address. *Konstantin Karst, 66 Kragujevac Street, 2 p.m.*

Eleanor Hvar gazed at him for a long time, her face so close to his, his eyes hurt to focus on it. "Konstantin Karst," she said slowly, "is no concern of yours, Warren." This time she spoke his name with authority.

"I've never even met the man, Eleanor."

"Karst has written a book that we want . . . that we *don't want published*," she said.

"We?" he said. "You and Doctor Decani?"

"We means the government, the people."

"Karst, then, is not a person?"

Her hands fell away from his shoulders, and she stepped back from his chair. Stone stood up, making a conscious effort not to sway. "I'm sorry," he said.

"You mean, you won't give me the manuscript, Warren?"

"I don't have any manuscript, Eleanor. What I was sorry about was that you spoke."

"The telephone call?"

"No," he answered grimly, "the request." Swiftly he pulled her to him and kissed her mouth. She made no move to push him away but she was unresponsive. "It was my job," she said, "my duty."

He let her go. "Well," he said, "that wasn't duty. It was my pleasure."

She thought he had relented.

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"You will give it to me, then, won't you?"

"Give it to you? Give what to you?" he said, finally angry. "I've never met Konstantin Karst. I don't know if he has the manuscript you're telling me about. And if he has, I don't know why in the world he would give it to me."

"And if he does?" Her eyebrows rose questioningly.

Stone wanted to tell her that then it would be *his* job, *his* duty, to keep the manuscript and to see it published. Twice in the same day Eleanor Hvar's and Maxim Grout's devotion to "doing their duty" made the expression doubly disquieting. "*If* he does, *when* he does, I'll think about what to do," he answered quietly, "but not before."

He asked her to phone for a taxi and while she did, laid the loden coat's briefcase on the desk in front of her and slammed his fist angrily down on the lock. It sprang open. Inside were three guns, a Luger, a Beretta, and a Webley-Vickers, as international an arsenal as Eleanor Hvar's book collection. There were several boxes of ammunition. He took the Luger out, loaded it, and stuck it in his belt.

"What's that for?" she asked as she put the phone down.

"Next time," he said. "Decani's men or whoever, I won't be caught off guard."

She looked unhappy. "This is not a game, you know... You'd better be careful, Warren, *very careful*," she said, in almost the same words and tone of combined menace and concern with which Grout had bidden him farewell a few hours earlier. Stone picked up the briefcase and followed her into the vestibule.

Just then the taxi tooted its horn softly. In spite of his objections, she came out to give the driver instructions for him while he peered into the darkness and held the Luger at the ready hidden behind the loden coat's briefcase. Though a crescent moon made the atmosphere even more Balkan than it was, all was calm, the night quiet, and no-one was visible on the street. As he stepped into the cab, Stone asked, "Will you have dinner with me tomorrow night?"

Her uncertainty was obvious, then slowly she nodded. As she closed the door, Stone wondered if she had consented because that would be after his appointment with Karst.

The hotel was all lit up, people were drinking at the bar and in the coffee shop, and from the taverna below came the sounds of jazz music. Though it seemed like two in the morning, Stone realised that it was only ten o'clock.

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Stone stopped to get his key and order some dinner to be sent up to his room, and at the desk found a letter from his partner, Sam Gordon. Upstairs, in the little alcove salon on his own floor, he saw a man, coat collar turned up, hat tilted over his face, apparently asleep in a red lounge chair. He took out the Luger again and clicked off the safety.

"Stone," a muffled voice called.

The Luger aimed and ready, Stone turned. It was Maxim Grout. Stone tucked the pistol back into his belt and Grout followed him silently down the corridor. When Stone pushed the door open, chaos greeted him. Everything had been overturned. Cupboards were open, the contents of drawers had been spilt over the floors, suitcases were jack-knifed wide, and the mirrors turned facing the wall. The bed was torn up and, as the open French windows swayed back and forth in the night breeze, little puffs of down came out of the slit pillows. Grout went swiftly across the room and out on the balcony, then came back and closed the French windows behind him. In his hand was a heavy iron bar with a curved end sharpened to a spear point. It looked like a longshoreman's loading hook.

"Some of *your* boys' work?" Stone queried, looking at the shambles around him. Grout shook his head.

"Looks like you're the target for tonight, Warren," Grout said sympathetically. "And like they really mean business," he added, holding up the longshoreman's hook.

"Sit down, Maxim," Stone replied shortly. "What's on your mind? You didn't come here at this time of night just to chat."

"No," Grout said, and Stone could see his feelings were hurt, "but I might have." He seemed reluctant to continue. "Come out on the balcony," he said finally, "I'll show you where I found that hook." He turned out the lights, opened the French windows, and they both stood out on the small balcony. *They* wouldn't let him alone, but who were these "theys?" Decani and Eleanor Hvar? The totem-pole and the loden coat? Michael Townsend, the cultural attaché, and Maxim Grout? And how about Konstantin Karst?

"Warren, I've been sent to see you officially and I didn't want to talk in there because the room may be, probably is, wired. There was a meeting at the Embassy this afternoon. Townsend told the staff that if anyone got a manuscript written by Konstantin Karst from you, or from anyone else, it was to be turned over to him immediately. What's more,

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no-one is to send any manuscript out by diplomatic bag for you without consulting him first."

"Can he make that stick?"

Grout nodded. "I was also instructed to tell you that you are to surrender any manuscript from Konstantin Karst directly to Townsend or me."

"That's the second offer I've had this evening, and in some ways, many ways, the second best."

"Decani's translator?"

"Yes."

"It figures. I'll bet she was beautiful." Grout took his pipe out and began to pack it with tobacco. "Townsend knows you're going to see Karst tomorrow. He wants the manuscript right afterwards."

"I'm an American citizen here on legitimate business," Stone said angrily. "I don't take orders from Townsend, or from the CIA."

"You won't be able to get the manuscript out of the country without using the diplomatic bag."

"And Townsend won't let me use the bag to send the manuscript to my own office. Even if he promised; he'd simply send it where *he* wanted and that would be that."

"I didn't say that, Warren."

"No, Maxim, you didn't. But that's the way it would be."

"You would be amply repaid for . . . the trouble you've gone to," Grout continued, looking embarrassed.

"Maxim, please shut up."

"This isn't my idea. I'm—"

"I know—just doing your job, *your duty*."

Grout lit up, his match making a small eye of flame in the night. "We could take your passport away—" he said softly —"in the national interest."

"You just try that. I know a couple of people too, and I'll make a stink in Congress," Stone raged. "First you come here and try to order me around, then you try to bribe me, and now you threaten me. You think I'm a fool or a scoundrel or a coward. Well, I may be all three, but not this trip. If you'd had any brains, you'd simply have *guaranteed* me—in writing—*the integrity* of Konstantin Karst's text. The fact that that's the one thing you've avoided doing means that it's exactly what you don't intend to do. I don't trust you."

"Why don't you sleep on it, Warren, before you answer."

"Was this your idea, Maxim?"

Grout shook his head slowly. "No," he said. "I suggested

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guaranteeing Karst's text, and they said no. It's out of my hands."

A loud knocking at the door interrupted them. Hastily, they came in off the balcony and Stone flicked on the lights.

"That's probably my dinner," Stone explained. It was. The waiter rolled it in on a tray, and when he saw the shambles almost jumped out of his white jacket.

Stone found he was ravenously hungry. "Would you like to join me, Maxim?" he invited.

"No. I had my dinner earlier, thank you. But I could use a drink."

Stone found the whisky bottle. At least the intruders hadn't molested that. He poured Grout half a tumbler, and left the bottle at his elbow. As he ate, Stone told him of the fight on Kalemegdan, Eleanor Hvar's offer and the call to Decani; then, he talked about the bronze sculpture on her desk.

As he described it, Grout snapped his fingers. "Mirko Sutnjak," he said, "that's *his* sculpture."

Grout's glance was odd, stunned. He was somehow moved.

"Mirko Sutnjak, he was once Konstantin Karst's best friend. They were two of the brightest young hopefuls of their generation: Karst in literature, Sutnjak in sculpture. They went to prison together, and when they came out they were Party leadership together.

"But Sutnjak was a different type. Perhaps, in the modern idiom, a more secure man. I don't know. But he didn't take orders easily. In the Party he was for resistance to the Nazis all along..." Grout lapsed into silence, as if the recounting were too painful. His face grew harder, almost grief-stricken; smoke poured from his pipe.

"And?" Stone coaxed. Grout downed his whisky and poured himself another.

"And? When the Nazis attacked Yugoslavia, Sutnjak didn't wait for the Party line to change on June 22, when the Soviet Union was invaded. He organised guerrillas, sabotage, fighting. In the winter of '41, the Party sent him to Dalmatia and Karst to Montenegro. Sutnjak's job was to set up supply lines and escape routes from the Dalmatian Coast through Bosnia into Serbia, then join Karst in Montenegro.

"The Party judgment was shrewd. They tried to get all the people together—Serb, Croat, Slovene, Montenegrin—to fight the Germans and Italians."

"But under *their* banner?"

"Of course." Grout rubbed his fingers across bloodshot

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eyes. "In some ways, Warren, the names are symbolic. Montenegro means Black Mountain. Karst, as you probably know, is the name for the limestone outcroppings in those very same mountains."

"You know, my name is Stone, Maxim," he interjected, only half humorously.

"I hadn't thought of that," Grout said, his face lighting up. "From what Townsend said about your war record, that's appropriate too, I guess."

"Oh," Stone said acidly. "Townsend's been checking up, huh?"

Grout looked uncomfortable. "You can be proud of that war record."

"Sure, sure. Nations always seem to like their killers better than their more constructive citizens."

"Not always. And we're all killers," Grout said.

"Like all men are mortal, eh Maxim? And each man kills what he loves best, is that what you mean?"

"The brave man with a sword . . . That couldn't apply more than to Konstantin Karst," Grout continued, obviously changing the subject. "Montenegrins are tough and savage, and proud of it. They were the only people in this part of the world that the Turks couldn't conquer. Their mountains are a natural stronghold, and they have a long history of guerrilla warfare. So Karst's job, in organising them against the Italians, could have been an overwhelming success. Except for zeal, and Karst was always a zealot."

His pipe had gone out and Grout relit it before continuing. "The Italians weren't the Germans. The Chetniks and the Partisans, under Karst and Sutnjak, combined and damn near cleared the Italian troops out of Montenegro. But the moment that it looked as if the battle was won, they quarrelled among themselves. They were already split every way politically. Karst blew the lid off by trying to make Chetniks into Communist Partisans. At first, Karst tried persuading the Chetniks. When he couldn't and since time was short, he tried force.

"Sutnjak was against the whole scheme, insisting that Karst's methods would drive the Chetniks into collaborating with the Italians. Which, of course, was exactly what did happen. In time, all the men knew where the two of them stood, and had taken sides. One day, after a particularly nasty business that led the Italians to shoot some fifty hostages, Karst and Sutnjak's quarrel became a fight. The men had to pull them apart.

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Some said Sutnjak had been drinking, and it's true he was a heavy drinker. They stopped talking to each other. Both of them, the story goes, appealed to the Party for a decision.

"Long before it came, Sutnjak was killed. No-one knew how, but everyone was sure Karst had murdered him. Karst said nothing, but the raids stopped. By then, morale was shot to pieces and the Chetniks and Italians, working together, had cut Karst's forces to ribbons. The Party withdrew him, and for two years, until 1943, they left Montenegro a Chetnik bastion, where a Partisan couldn't show his nose."

Tears welled up in Grout's eyes and he bent over his pipe to hide them. Stone knew Grout was trying to tell him something, but what? Was it simply a warning about getting involved?

They sat unmoving, and Stone thought about Eleanor Hvar and the magnificent bronze that Mirko Sutnjak had shaped out of his anguish and almost in prophecy of his fate. Thinking about them both he felt a sense of personal loss that a man who had moulded such a bronze was dead, and a pang of jealousy that that man had been Eleanor Hvar's husband.

A knock at the door brought him back. Grout sat upright. It was the waiter to clear away his supper. With him he brought the same porter and chambermaid who had come the night before to remove the traces of Antun Vuk's death. Now they began to straighten the mess that had been made in his room, the chambermaid dragging her right foot—the foot that Decani had deliberately crushed. It was in a small cast from ankle to toe.

Grout heaved himself up. He looked white and tired, but his eyes flamed. Stone took him to the door. "You going to report this?" Grout asked.

"Doesn't seem much point," Stone answered. "Decani's right hand knows what his left is doing."

"They may not be Decani's men."

"If not his, and not Townsend's, then whose?"

"Karst has more enemies than you can shake a Luger at," Grout said, ignoring the dig about Townsend. "Whoever it is doesn't even want you to *see* Karst. That Tatra that tried to run us down on our way to Decani, and those hoodlums on Kalemegdan were trying to scare you. Next time they might really try to stop you. That little hook there—" he pointed to where he had left it on the chair—"looks like the real thing to me; the kind you use to kill not to scare. Decani doesn't want to stop you from seeing Karst, or he wouldn't have

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made the appointment for you. *He wants you to get the manuscript for him.* Those others don't care." As he turned to go, Grout asked if they would meet the next day.

"Is that official or personal, Maxim? Or can't you tell any more?"

"As you wish."

"That's no answer."

"I told you once, Warren, I'm an official representative here of the American Government. I have no option. I also gave you Townsend's message. Sleep on it before you answer."

When Grout had gone, Stone sat heavily in a chair, exhaustion sweeping over him. The porter was putting his suitcases back into the luggage racks, the chambermaid had replaced his pillows with new ones and remade his bed. He watched them until they were finished, forcing his eyes to stay open. Then he gave them five hundred dinars each and admired the way they bowed out. Feeling as if he was moving through water, Stone stripped off his clothing and got into his pyjamas. He checked the Luger, and put it under his pillow. As he did so, his hand brushed a slip of paper. Oh no, something inside him cried, not again. Not now. But he took the paper out, clumsily unfolding it. It was another note from Karst, brief but somehow exultant.

Dear Mister Stone,

We have an official appointment tomorrow at two. It is much better so. Don't worry: I have taken care of everything.

Yours, Konstantin Karst

PS Burn this, please.

Wearily, Stone reread the note, thinking fuzzily that the chambermaid had put it there. Her dragging foot in the white cast, Antun Vuk's corpse, and Karst's European handwriting all materialised before his tired eyes. "Don't worry: I have taken care of everything." If that was the way Konstantin Karst took care of everything, he for one would do without. Laboriously, Stone got up, found his matches and burnt the note. Then he flushed the ashes away, and rinsed the ashtray.

Back in bed he remembered Gordon's letter but couldn't make himself get up again to read it. He turned off the lights, slipped one hand under the pillow and, comforted by the feel of the Luger's steel barrel, was almost at once asleep.

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The phone rang tinnily as Stone fought his way up through sleep to reach it. The voice spoke his name, but his tongue could shape no answering words. "Mister Stone, Mister Stone?" the voice asked. "It's Petar Decani. Are you all right?"

"I . . . am . . . all . . . right," he heard himself say, each word a sentence and separate. He had slept ten hours and was still exhausted. Decani, telephoning from the hotel lobby, offered to wait until Stone got his breakfast.

By the time Decani and Stone's breakfast arrived, he had taken advantage of the respite to hide the Luger and Sam Gordon's unopened letter beneath the mattress. Decani was brisk and came directly to the point, a point Eleanor Hvar, beautiful and perfumed, had made more effectively for him.

"We want Karst's manuscript, Mister Stone, and I think you can see why. This country is united now. We have enough problems without reviving old hatreds. We don't want troubles. Konstantin Karst is a troublemaker . . ."

Stone leaned back, enjoying his morning cigarette and Turkish coffee, and repeated what he had told Eleanor Hvar and Grout before, that he had not talked to Karst, didn't know if there was any manuscript, and was by no means sure Karst would offer it to him if there was.

"But if he does give it to you, what then?"

"It will depend on what conditions Mr. Karst places on my accepting it," Stone replied.

Briefly Stone told Decani about the marauders of the night before, at Kalemegdan and at the hotel, describing the totem-pole and the loden coat, and showing him the longshoreman's hook. Decani did not seem to be discomfited by the fact that the totem-pole had worked in his own building, but when Stone described the attack on Eleanor Hvar, Decani's face paled and flushed, his blue lips writhed, and his reflecting glasses flashed ominously in the morning sunshine. "We shall find Mister Stevan Jazak," he promised, and there was no mistaking the menace in the words: *Stevan Jazak*.

"Is that his name?" Stone inquired.

"That was the name he used at the Ministry," Decani replied shortly, and rose to go.

When he had gone, Stone opened Sam Gordon's letter. It was mostly about business, but ended up characteristically. "Remember you're on vacation and their women are fine, better than ours. The Slovenes are the most beautiful, but

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the Serbs are the way they always say they like their coffee: 'Hot as hell, black as night, and sweet as sin.'" Stone thought he'd remember to tell that to Eleanor Hvar. There was a postscript and it stood out of the text most of all. "Have you seen Konstantin Karst? I have it on good authority that he has a sure-fire best-seller in the drawer, so you'd better. If the bidding gets tough, just mention 'Flash' Gordon to him."

Stone knew Sam Gordon better than he knew anyone alive, which he supposed didn't say much, but when had Gordon been in Yugoslavia? He was pretty sure Sam had not been there during the war—he'd been in Africa and Italy—but afterwards, some time between 1946, and 1950 when they had met and started their literary agency? Had Sam still been in the Army then, the Foreign Service, Intelligence? Had he actually known Konstantin Karst? And had Decani's men tampered with the envelope? It seemed untouched.

It wasn't until he was about to leave that he noticed the longshoreman's hook was gone, and realised Decani must have taken it.

KARST's house was on the outskirts of the city, though still in it, a one-storey burnt-umber stucco building with a triangular red slate roof and a tombstone-thin slab of chimney. Set away from its neighbours and surrounded by a high wall, the house had only one entrance, a wooden and iron grillework door, with a bell on it.

When Stone rang he heard the faint echo somewhere inside, a short click, and the door swung open a few inches. He went in. He was in a garden which ran along the side of the house and opened out on a terrace, with another garden in the rear. On the terrace, beneath plane trees, were two concrete, mushroom-shaped tables ringed by green wooden chairs. Beyond the rear wall, the land sloped sharply to give the house an eminence from which there was a magnificent view of the city spread out below, unobstructed by houses on the street directly behind.

The path led to the entrance, all the way round on the other side of the house. Before Stone reached it, a man came out and stood on the top step waiting for him. Stone was certain he had seen that face before many times in the newspapers, but a version flattened and made characterless by newsprint. Ascetic, almost unlined, its youthfulness clashed sharply with the short Lincolnesque black beard, the dark

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hair brushed straight back from a high, thoughtful forehead and the shaggy sideburns, which needed cutting, glinting silvery in the sunlight. The eyes had that same opaque unfathomable quality one sees in film stars and politicians, as if one is looking into the shutter of a camera. It was not a face easily forgotten.

"Mister Stone?" the man said, coming down the steps from the house, hand outstretched. "I've looked forward to your arrival for a long time." His speech was precise, even flowing, with an undercurrent of vehemence and oddness of intonation that made Stone uneasy. "I am Konstantin Karst."

They shook hands and Karst led him to one of the mushroom-shaped tables and gestured for him to be seated. They sat in the green chairs across from each other, shaded by the plane trees that made the light that fell between them a clear, disembodied green. Stone knew he was being given Karst's unabashed and minute scrutiny. He sat back and looked at the lilacs, the gnarled walnut trees, struck by the beauty of the pale green light.

"Well," he said to Karst finally, "have I passed muster?"

"You must forgive my bad manners," Karst said soberly. "There is much to be learned from a man's face, and I wanted to be sure before we began our talk."

"You're sure now?" Stone asked, sceptical.

There was only faint hesitation before Karst nodded. "As sure as this much can tell me. More time would tell me more, but time we have very little of." He paused. "The difficulty is to know where to begin. It will be simpler if you tell me what you have heard about me and what has happened to you since your arrival."

It was Stone's turn to look at Karst for a long time, knowing how skilfully Karst was turning the tables, testing his honesty, and giving himself more time to make a judgment. Leaving out only that Townsend had sent Grout to ask for Karst's manuscript, Stone told him how he had come to Yugoslavia and what had happened since. Karst listened impassively except that, at the description of the murder of Antun Vuk, his flat, shutter-like black eyes seemed focused on a flame, and widened and narrowed as if taking a photograph to be filed away for some future but not vague reference. In leaving out the fact that the Embassy wanted Karst's manuscript, Stone felt somehow he was betraying Karst.

He felt even worse when Karst began to talk. "Mister

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Stone, we are going to have to trust each other. I know how difficult that is on short notice, between people of different backgrounds. In fact," his smile was controlled but genuine, "how difficult it is for any two people, even of similar backgrounds.

"First, there isn't *a* manuscript; there are *four* manuscripts. One is an autobiographical work on my time as a Party leader and Vice-President. The second is a political work, what we used to call a polemic, on the nature of socialism, class, the state and freedom. Third, there is a novel set during the collectivisation drive here. And last there is a book of lyric poems dedicated to Mirko Sutnjak." After a moment, he added, "... the man I loved best in my life." He used the word love without an iota of self-consciousness or qualification, which Stone admired, even as he questioned if it was only Karst's shrewd tactic to reject the slightest implication in Sutnjak's death.

"The manuscripts are not here. They are completed. But keeping them in this house would be a mistake. I am entertaining you out here in the garden because I have no doubt my house is wired, my phone tapped. In fact, it is what I would do to someone like me, if I were still with them. Petar Decani is—how do you call it?—a methodical man.

"The manuscripts are well-hidden. If you agree, you shall have them all."

Agree to what? Stone wondered. Already he felt the fascination of the man, the combination of cold logic and passionate intensity, and the refusal to beat about the bush.

"First," Karst continued, raising his index finger, "let me try to clear up some of the mysteries. I knew you were coming to this country because someone delivered a message to your partner, Gordon, for me, and Gordon told him. 'Flash' Gordon we used to call him, because of his tongue and his temper. Also because of his bravery and his way with women, our women." There was almost a note of ruefulness, of injury, in his voice. "He was like us, like a Montenegrin," Karst added, and Stone saw that that was almost the greatest compliment Karst could pay. "I owed Gordon a debt. He saved my life once. I also knew I could trust him. He was stationed here for almost three years, from 1947 to 1949, as part of the military attaché's staff, but probably he was working for your Intelligence service. It was during that whole period when we were breaking away from the Russian bear-hug."

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Stone was furious. Why the hell hadn't Sam told him? His face must have shown his feelings.

"You mustn't be angry because he said nothing to you. That was one of my conditions. I wanted you to act normally for I thought it would be your best protection and mine.

"There were those among us who did not want to break away from the Russians. Some were sincere. They thought our destiny and history were on the side of the East. Some were in the Russians' pay. Some were both. One of them was a man who has dogged my footsteps like a *Doppelgänger*. I think he must be my fate. What his real name is I do not know, but he has been Kucic, Vlakovich, Krupa, and now I think he is your *Stevan Jazak*, and I will use that name, since it is familiar to you.

"I met him first in prison, a Communist like myself, but a man I could not like in spite of it. He was not concerned with socialism so much as he was thrilled by revolution; he despised justice, but he worshipped power and violence. Simply, he was a murderer who had found a cause."

Karst stood up and looked over the twisted walnut trees and breeze-bent grass to the city below. "Sometimes, I think that Mirko Sutnjak and Jazak were my good and evil angels.

"Jazak was Bosnian by birth, a Bogomil, I think; he was part of another Eastern tradition too—the tradition of the assassin with pistol, dynamite and bomb. He was in the mountains with us. He had helped Mirko Sutnjak in Bosnia. When Mirko and I quarrelled about strategy, or tactics, Jazak took my side. He was always on the side of killing. And I was angry because I thought Mirko was wrong, afraid to appear harsh. But Mirko Sutnjak, Mister Stone, was simply more intelligent than I. Politically, humanly. He knew that what I was doing was humanly evil and politically a mistake. He knew what the killing would do and he hated killing.

"And Jazak hated him. He said Mirko was not like us, we mountain men, Bosnians and Montenegrins. He was soft, a Dalmatian from the coast, and everyone knew Dalmatians were half-Italian and effeminate. And a sculptor! What disturbed him most was Mirko's daring, his bravery; Jazak said he lacked 'revolutionary vigilance'—that was the phrase at the time—and he should be eliminated. But he said it in such a way I always thought he was joking.

"Then Mirko and I had that stupid fight. I should have known better, but Mirko was drinking and he made it an issue

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in front of the men. Though by then I knew he was right and I wrong, I was too proud to admit it before the others. We fought and the men separated us. We were both angry, very angry, though it would have blown over in a few days. We had fought many times in the past, over politics, books, girls, and always it was forgotten in a few days' time.

"Only this time, Mirko was dead. Someone had emptied into him a whole magazine. Everyone thought it was I. So I said nothing. What was there to say? That I hadn't done it? That I had not killed my best friend?

"Only three of us could have killed Mirko, if it was one of us. Jazak was one of *them*. One thing, however, made no sense. It still doesn't. Why should he kill Mirko? If he was a Soviet agent—and I think he was, and is—they wanted us to camouflage our political colouration in those days, to be nationalist patriots, not Communists. That should have put Jazak on Mirko's side, not mine, *if the instructions to kill him were theirs*." He bore down heavily on the last words, and Stone could almost feel Karst turning the thing over and over again in his mind. These problems were things Karst had lived with for so long that they were thorns grown into flesh, flesh he tore in anguish, in guilt, to see where it had betrayed him. Stone felt a sudden peevish pity for the man.

"It was not until 1943, during the Fourth Offensive, that I met Jazak again. I was convinced he had killed Mirko, but I had no evidence and foolishly I accused him. He laughed in my face. He did not give me a yes or no, just laughed. My temper rose and I threw him to the ground. He tried to kill me and I cut his face open with an SS dagger that I had taken from a dead German: one of those things with a silver haft whose end was shaped like the head and beak of the Nazi eagle, decorated with a silver *Hakenkreuz*. Jazak will bear that remembrance of me to his grave."

"He does, Mr. Karst," Stone corroborated, and described the scar. "It is not a face that will make women admire him."

The sound of a door closing interrupted. Karst's head turned and Stone followed his glance. A woman, fully as tall as Karst and almost as powerfully built, carried a tray down the steps from the house, walking with a grace and pride that not even the coffee service and *rakija* bottle could unbalance. Her fine dark head was thrown back, her spine straight, her broad shoulders squared. Magnificent looking, her size in no way diminished the sense of her femininity; instead, it enhanced it.

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Though Karst remained seated, Stone stood up, and she inclined her head slightly to him as she put down the copper tray on the table between him and Karst. She stood next to her husband, her hands palms down on the table, the long fingers with their unpainted nails spread like a fan. Karst's hand stole over one of hers, covered it, and then, looking at her rather than at Stone, he said in French, "This is Madame Karst. Alexandra, this is Mister Warren Stone, the man I told you would come from America."

Stone had barely finished his *Enchanté* when, without preliminaries, Alexandra Karst said in French, "I was hoping you would not come." She was embarrassed. "Please sit down," she said. "I did not mean that personally. Only it would be better if Konstantin, my husband, forgot about publishing those books abroad. They can only bring him disaster."

Karst's hand tightened on hers but did not stop her.

"They have done enough to him. And they will do more. They have taken everything away, his position, his honours, even this house. Soon we must find a flat now because this house is required by protocol."

"Alexandra!" Karst's voice warned.

"He should know," she said, addressing Karst. "Maybe he can speak sense to you." She turned her attention to Stone. "They can do nothing to him, he says, they would not dare. They *will* dare, and he knows they will. They will send him to rot in prison, or worse. He has sat in enough prisons and given enough of his life. *I* want him now," she said boldly. "I need him. And the children."

"*Point final,*" Karst said evenly. He did not raise his voice, but it carried command. He leaned over to fill the three small glasses on the tray from the *rakija* bottle. He raised his own glass, and for an instant the sun caught it, and it shone like an ingot of green gold. "*To freedom,*" he said unexpectedly.

"To freedom," Stone repeated, touching glasses, but Alexandra Karst had not picked up her glass, though her hand had retreated from beneath her husband's.

"Alexandra?" Karst said.

"I do not believe in words, Konstanty," she replied slowly, looking straight into his face. "Especially such large words."

"What do you believe in?" Karst asked, very softly, and Stone saw he was witnessing part of a long, bitter quarrel.

"I believe in you..."

"...but not in my words?"

She shook her dark head stubbornly. "I believe in you,"

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she repeated, "in the children, in myself." She turned and said, "You must excuse me, Mister Stone." Gravely, without hurrying, she went back into the house, having left her glass on the copper tray untouched.

"She does not believe in freedom," Karst said, as if talking to himself. "She believes only in what she can see and touch..."

"...and feel?"

"And feel," Karst corroborated.

"Perhaps she is right."

"No," Karst said firmly. "No. Alexandra is wrong. She is quite wrong. *Only freedom is important.* Happiness, as distinct from pleasure, depends very little on material possessions once you are above a reasonable subsistence level. Beyond that, *freedom is everything.*

"It is my fault. She has heard me make too many speeches. She has seen me juggle too many abstractions. Now she believes in none of them, in nothing. She does not believe in politics at all. She has simply moved away and, so to speak, left it all."

"I don't believe in politics either. And that's what I've tried to do too, but the world is on the side of killing and killers."

"You speak in pain," Karst said. "It is sometimes necessary to kill."

"Human beings?"

"Yes, human beings. Because they would make such a *merde* of the world otherwise. The Stevan Jazaks, for instance. To them, you must be merciless or the world is doomed. I have killed with my own hands, and I am not ashamed of it."

"I have killed and not killed," Stone replied, "and I'm ashamed of both."

"You Americans are spoiled, Mister Stone. Death is not so horrible as life sometimes, and killing not so terrible as not killing. There are times when life is insupportable... And you don't understand about your finest political possession: *freedom, freedom!*"

He leaned forward in his chair. "As I was gradually breaking away from my old beliefs, what impressed me most was the realisation that people living under a totalitarian regime in many ways adopt the values of the regime unconsciously. They don't even realise that what is now called 'liberalisation' —which heaven knows is a hundred times better than what came before—is still only a poor mockery of freedom. The result is a greyness in which people don't even have the fire

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of inner rebellion, and passivity masquerades as contentment. All the ideology this side of Lenin can't change the simple fact that freedom means everything; and your people should be telling our people that."

"But many of us, your wife perhaps, and certainly I, myself, want the freedom to be left alone, to have a private life."

"The world is too small, Mister Stone, only a shrunken apple now. You will *not* be left alone. There's no such thing as a private life any more. That old and privileged world is dead. The only way you can be left alone at all, the only way you can have even the shreds of a private life, is to fight for the best kind of public one."

"'There is no cloister so sequestered as can keep politics out,'" Stone said.

"Jonathan Swift," Karst said, as if identifying a quotation in class. "And he was absolutely right."

They sat in the dappled green silence drinking the thick Turkish coffee from little white cups, the only sounds the buzzing of a single black horsefly attracted to the rim of Alexandra Karst's still full glass of *rakija*.

"You will take the manuscripts?" Karst asked finally, and for the first time Stone saw how desperately important to him it was, how much he was counting on it.

Why were *words* so important to revolutionaries as a preface to and explanation of their revolutionary *acts*? Why was a book so important in a world of violence? Was it really that only the war of words was possible?

"I will," Stone said, realising—with a lurch—that he would ... It was as if he had missed the last step on a flight of stairs. Nor was he sure why he was doing it. For Karst? For Eleanor Hvar? For Sam Gordon? It wasn't so much *for* what or whom as it was *against*. Against being pushed and prodded, chivvied and crowded, as he had been. Against Decani and Jazak; yes, and against Townsend too. And most of all against those who killed Antun Vuk. *Against*.

This was a facet of life in which words were both means of communication and weapons; and this war of words was both public and private. Was the war *for* freedom, or simply *against* tyranny? If it was only a choice of lesser evils, if it was *against* the latter, wasn't it necessarily, at least in part, *for* the former? Was choice ever couched in any but those terms?

Karst glanced at his watch and his voice became a conspiratorial whisper. "There isn't much time. You should not

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stay here too long with me. I will speak quickly. If you have questions, stop me. The manuscripts are in Dubrovnik. All of them. There are no copies. If these are lost, the books are altogether lost. I do not think I could reproduce them."

"No copies, but why?"

"It would have increased the chances for being found out. Also, if they found copies before you published, they could print and leave out what parts they didn't like, then accuse your edition of fraudulent interpolations."

"But you could deny..."

"They would permit no denials." The camera-dark eyes shuttered and looked away. "You must go to Dubrovnik as if you were on a vacation, or taking a tourist trip. Wait at least a week before you go, more if you can, to throw them off the track, but *not* more than three weeks.

"Someone will come to you in due course... He will say to you, 'Mirko Sutnjak is my brother.' He will be able to recognise you, never fear."

"And the manuscripts, how can I get them out of the country?" Stone asked. "Decani is watching me, and Jazak."

"And your own people will not help you. I surmised as much. They would like the manuscripts for their own purposes, to be printed in a form acceptable to them. *I want you to promise me that the books will be published as I wrote them.*"

"Of course, that's the point."

"Yes," Karst said appreciatively, "that *is* the point. They will not leave you alone. When you walk out of here, and they find out that you have *not* got the manuscripts, they are not going to let you out of their sight, or out of the country until they find them. Until they can make you tell them where the manuscripts are hidden, or until you lead them to them. That is why I am *not* going to tell you where the manuscripts are. It is as much for your protection as for mine.

"You are armed?"

Stone drew his jacket aside so Karst could see the Luger. Karst nodded approvingly, matter-of-factly. "If you see Jazak, kill him. Don't wait. He won't wait for you. Decani wants what he thinks is one manuscript so it can be destroyed, or at least kept from publication. There is the Revolution, the Party, the State, and my former Comrades to safeguard from my bile and slander. Jazak, I think, has orders to kill you

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once you have seen me, because I might have given you information and because that is the way they are, those are their methods. They know I have information which connects with Stalin and his horrors. And if I told you, you might one day talk. In their mind, the only way to keep that from happening is to make you tongueless. That is also one of the reasons Decani wants the manuscript. Our government wants good relations with the Soviets now."

"And what about you?" Stone asked. "Once the books are published, and even before, when they find out, they will know that you gave them to me."

"Alexandra is right," Karst replied, with a quick, furtive glance at the house. "They will not leave me in peace. They will have to do something." His face grew sombre. "Just what, I don't know."

"And your wife and children?"

"I don't think they will touch them. *I* will be enough."

Slowly, Karst leaned over and poured their glasses full of *rakija* again. They touched glasses and silently drank.

"Is it worth it?" Stone asked finally.

"I have no option because I must choose. That is what freedom is, the possibility and obligation to choose. And I have chosen."

For Karst there was no turning back; however tortuous and tortured the road he had taken, Karst would follow it to the end. Stone knew that he was going to have to go along that same road for a good while, and that unlike Karst, who seemed to feel no fear, he was afraid.

Alexandra Karst came out of the house with the children. A boy of seven and a little girl of perhaps five each held one of her hands. On the top step, before descending in unison, they all hesitated and in that moment Stone saw them as Karst's triptych of hostages to fortune, a moving argument for not doing what he was doing. She introduced the children to Stone. "This is Mirko," she said of the boy, and Stone just succeeded in repressing a start. If he needed further proof that Karst had not murdered Mirko Sutnjak, this was it. "And this is Lidija." Both children shook his hand gravely.

"Alexandra," Karst said, "I wish to show Mister Stone some things in the house. You will keep the children out here."

She led them off to the rear garden.

Karst took Stone indoors, and into his study. He closed the study door, and beckoned Stone to follow. Stone went with him to the wall where Karst lifted a portrait of Tito and

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turned the picture hook a full 180 degrees, and the wall suddenly and silently began to move, opening like a door on well-oiled hinges. Karst walked into a corridor behind, flicked a pale yellow light on, and Stone followed. Karst touched a second switch below the light switch and the wall moved silently closed behind them. The corridor dropped steeply until they came to a very small room, with palliasses on the floor.

Here Karst began Stone's secret briefing, telling him of the man who would meet him in Dubrovnik and lead him to the manuscripts, and after that to a hidden boat. Bari, in Italy, was only some hundred miles across the Adriatic. The crossing could easily be made in a single night. "Do you know about boats?" Karst asked.

"I think I can manage."

"It is the old route that Mirko Sutnjak set up," Karst said. "It has worked for many people many times before."

Karst led Stone back to his study, closed the wall behind them, and they returned to the garden. Still keeping his voice low, Karst asked, "Then everything is clear?"

"No, not everything," Stone replied, "but the plan is

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clear. There are some business points to be decided. I shall take copyright of the books in your name, but what shall I do with the money? I could put the money in an escrow account for you in a Swiss bank. Perhaps," Stone hesitated, "it would be wiser to put the account in both your names."

"You mean, if—yes, that is better. Then if Alexandra wants money, she can have it," Karst affirmed quickly.

"And should we be questioned about our conversation together today, we will say we merely talked, but about what?"

"Books, of course. Literature. I recommended you to read some of our old Serb epics, but I thought most of our new books too provincial for your audience. I did not mention names or titles. I also asked you about the postwar American writers."

Stone nodded. "I'll need that. Decani and Townsend may not ask, but Grout will."

"Grout? Maxim Grout? Is he still here? You mean they haven't declared him *persona non grata* and thrown him out?" Karst's face lit up. "How marvellous! Our old friend Max."

"Do you know him?"

"He knows more about us than almost any of your people. Or even the British. And he should. Didn't Max tell you?" Stone shook his head.

"We were students together, Mirko, Max and I, in the last two years of the gymnasium, and then in the first two years of the university. When I came from my father's house in Montenegro, I stayed with Max's family in Belgrade until I found my own place to live."

Stone was astonished at the youthfulness that had come across Karst's face.

"In the mid-thirties Max's father saw the war coming, and he took his family to America. Max hated to go, because we were such close friends. We wrote for a long time, until I went to prison and he went into the foreign service. Then it would have been unwise for both of us, and we stopped. But he and Mirko wrote to the end."

Though Grout and Karst had seen each other from time to time during the war, and even fought in operations together, they usually avoided one another and rarely spoke. "Perhaps he, too, thought I was guilty of Mirko's death," Karst said reflectively, "though we never talked of that, or of Mirko, or of the old days." He tugged at his little beard. "Later we stopped talking altogether. Because they knew we had been

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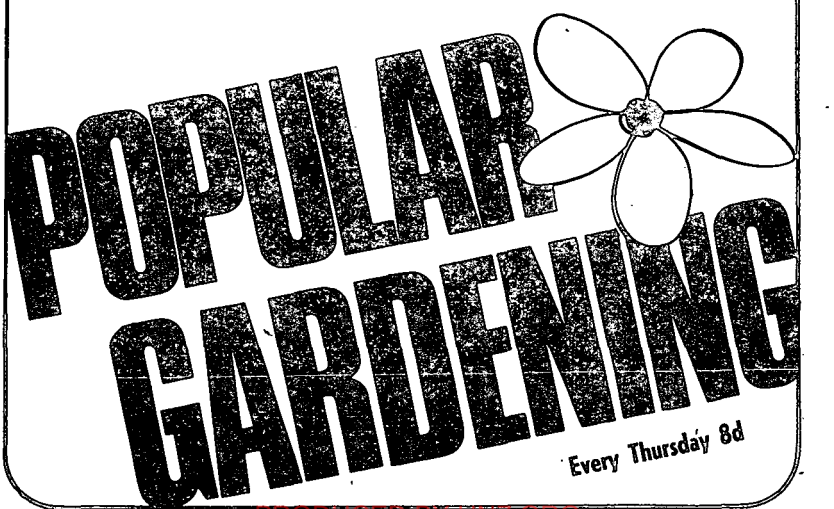

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good friends, I was given orders to recruit Max as an agent for us. I argued that it was useless, that I knew Max, but they insisted. They were orders and Party discipline was Party discipline, so I tried. I failed, of course. Max immediately rejected my offer and reported it to the head of the American mission. It didn't help our relations much. We snubbed each other after that, but I sometimes had the feeling that Max was doing it more because he didn't want to compromise me than for his own protection."

The clear green light beneath the plane trees had muddied, and the murk seemed to invade Stone's spirit.

"By 1952, Max knew that I was breaking away, from what I wrote, and he didn't want to give any of my people a chance to pin an espionage charge on me through him. Finally, after I was relieved of my government posts, and then only once, he spoke to me as he once had, as a friend. For the first time since the university he addressed me in the familiar form, and asked if he could help me."

"And?"

Karst shrugged. "There was no way to help—unless I wanted to leave the country and become an exile, an emigré, and I didn't."

Karst lapsed into silence, his eyes closed, and he leaned back unseeing in his chair. The murky green light made his face remote and sombre, like something carved of stone; eyeless now, he looked like a sculpture of one of the ancient Caesars. Stone saw how much the afternoon had taken out of Karst. Stone knew that he had stayed too long.

He got up, and picked his coat off the back of the chair. Karst's shuttered eyes opened and for a moment they mirrored his anguish. "I have involved you both in the Balkans and in history, Mister Stone, and both are cataclysms."

"No, Mr. Karst, you have reinvolved me in life, though that too may be only a cataclysm," Stone replied.

Karst nodded, smiling. He understood. He stood up, his features again composing themselves into the face of the public figure. He called his wife and she came with the children to say goodbye. Karst took him around the side of the house to the gate. Before opening it, he stopped and said, "I am greatly in your debt."

"And I in yours."

They shook hands urgently, as if they would not see one another again, then Stone was in the street, the gate clanging shut behind him.

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The moment he looked around the empty street, he knew he should have called a taxi and been driven back to his hotel, but he was ashamed to ring Karst's bell once again. He looked up and down the empty street suspiciously though nothing except the silence seemed extraordinary. He put his hand inside his jacket and took out the Luger. Shielding it with his coat, he checked the ammunition and the safety, slung the coat over his forearm, then tucked the Luger under it at the ready.

Stone walked downhill towards the city. The streets were narrow and winding, and ran between high walls or fences, many of them topped and covered with vines which hid the villas behind from prying eyes. Stone had the feeling he was being watched, that eyes followed every step he took, that all his movements were being gauged and measured, but he saw no-one.

He walked quickly, on the balls of his feet, having all he could do to keep from breaking into a run; a preternaturally loud alarm clock ticking in his head was only the pounding of his heart. A sudden flashing from the heavy ivy on top of one stucco wall across the street startled him. He tore his gun out from under his coat, but it was only a rush of swallows skimming skyward from their perch, veering and thrusting their way into the violet late-afternoon air.

Stone leaned against a high wooden fence and began to laugh with almost hysterical relief, and while he was still laughing, there was a sound of tearing wood next to his cheek. A gouged out piece of fence flicked past his face and into the air like a giant raw toothpick. Even as he threw himself flat on the ground, Stone realised that someone was shooting at him with a high-powered rifle.

The second shot came, splintering the fence a little on his other side. The rifleman had him bracketed. Stone picked out the street above him on the hillside as the general area from which the shots had come, but he could not see his assailant. The distance was far beyond the range of his Luger. The third shot whined over his head, chipped the sidewalk just beyond his heels and ricocheted into the fence. Stone turned his body profile to the line of fire, offering less target, and began to inch along the pavement. He was no longer frightened. His mind worked coolly and clearly. At the end of the street, the road took a sharp bend; if he could make it, the turn would block the rifleman's field of fire.

Another bullet grooved the paving in front of him spraying

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concrete fragments into his face and hair, and he stopped. The rifleman was not trying to kill him, but was toying with him, deliberately boxing him in, and keeping him flattened out on the ground. Since the man was apparently a crack shot, he must have something else in mind. The orderly chugging of an automobile engine made Stone turn his head. It was a small green Fiat like the one that had seemed to be following them when he and Eleanor Hvar had gone to Kalemegdan. His instinct told him it was the same car but he couldn't be sure. Should he try to kill the driver now before he got to him, or damage the car? But suppose it was not the same Fiat—suppose the driver was an innocent man?

The Fiat came roaring down the street. Stone braced the Luger in his right hand with his left, using his elbows like the legs of a tripod, as the car neared him. But it didn't stop. Stone saw the bottle come flying out of the window towards him and knew what it was. Instinctively, he fired at it, and simultaneously rolled away from where the bottle would land and smash if he had missed. He heard the splintering glass and roar of flame in the same instant, then saw his coat aflame. The smell of his own singed hair stank in his nostrils. He jerked his arm out from under the coat, but his jacket sleeve had already caught fire. Expecting the impact of a rifle bullet in his body at any moment, Stone leapt to his feet, tore the jacket off, stamped the fire out beneath his feet. An eight- or ten-foot pool of fire was searing the pavement black and melting the tar of the roadway. His shot had splintered the Molotov cocktail prematurely, so that only the outer edge of burning gasoline had touched his coat with flame.

Stone turned to look after the Fiat, his Luger ready, and he saw the end of the street blocked by a large black Tatra car. The green Fiat's brakes screeched, tyres whined, and then came the gnashing sound of tearing steel. The Fiat struck, seemed to bounce off the Tatra, then turned over on its side. So huge that he seemed comic emerging from the small car, the loden coat climbed out of it, gun in hand, and began to run towards Stone. For a fat man he was very swift. From behind the Tatra came Petar Decani and two men in belted black raincoats, chasing him. The rifle up the hill barked and one of the belted black raincoats pitched forward, and did not get up.

Another shot rang out, but nothing happened. Stone looked

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up to the hillside and saw two men struggling over a rifle pointed skyward. One of them he was sure was the totem-pole, the other looked like Townsend, but before he could tell for certain, the two grappling figures fell from sight.

The loden coat had seen them too, and he whirled, raising his arm to fire point-blank at Decani—when Stone shot him through the right shoulder. The gun fell out of the loden coat's hand, and as he bent to pick it up with his other hand, Decani charged at him. Running towards them, Stone saw the revolver in Decani's right fist and the metal rod in his left, which he raised and slammed down on the loden coat's neck. A bellow echoed down the street and the loden coat collapsed on his face like a felled bull, the longshoreman's hook sticking out just above his collarbone like a matador's *banderilla.* The man's great bulk shuddered once, a giant paroxysm, and then he lay still.

Decani stood over him, breathing hard, his eyes wild and dilated, his trick glasses catching and reflecting the rays of the setting sun. Decani stared at him, his eyes still unfocused and perhaps unseeing, and said, "If they had used a grenade instead of a Molotov cocktail . . ." He didn't finish the sentence. Then, as if he was suddenly reminded of the rifleman on the hill, he put his palm over his eyes, Indian-style, and looked up.

"If that rifleman had wanted to kill me, he could have easily, as easily as with a grenade," Stone said, his insides shaking as if they were breaking away from their inner moorings. "I guess they had a warmer reception in mind."

"Did you recognise the rifleman?" Decani asked.

"I only saw him for a moment. It looked like—" Stone almost said Kucic, but caught himself in time—"the same man as on Kalemegdan—the one I saw working in your building."

"Stevan Jazak?"

"You said that was his name, I think."

Decani scanned the hillside above them. "I wonder why he didn't shoot us down," he said. Stone walked back to pick up his jacket. When he did, the sleeve fell off in a small shower of blackened ash. The ravell'd sleave of care . . which can't be knit up, Stone thought, laughing sourly to himself. His wallet, with passport, papers and money, was untouched and he transferred it from the jacket breast pocket to his trousers. Nearby, the Molotov cocktail was burning itself out, and the gutter had been melted into an oozing tar sea. They hadn't

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used a grenade because they wanted to burn up the manuscript with him. Thinking of the two bodies—the loden coat and the black-belted raincoat—he was reminded that three people had already died for Karst's manuscripts, one of them only a boy. He put on the jacket, his left sleeve flapping where the tweed sleeve should be. Sackcloth and ashes, he thought, sackcloth and ashes.

"It doesn't seem worth it, does it, Mister Stone?" Decani asked abruptly.

"What doesn't?"

"Karst's manuscript. Did you get it, Mister Stone?" Decani asked casually.

"Do I look as if I'm carrying a manuscript?" Stone replied irritably, flapping his shirt sleeve.

Decani did not insist. After a parting glance at the overturned Fiat and the still burning pool of gasoline, he led Stone to a big grey Mercedes-Benz parked a street away. Only when they had started, Decani poker-faced at the wheel, did Stone realise that in spite of the shots, flames and car crash, no-one had ventured out into the street to see what was happening.

At the hotel, Decani pulled the car up and looked Stone over appraisingly. "You're sure Konstantin Karst gave you no manuscript?"

"Not a single one," Stone said, disliking the lie even if it only skirted the truth. "You can see for yourself. Now, if you can make some appointments for me with some of your writers who *do* have manuscripts and books, that would help."

Decani looked at him for a while longer, as if reassessing his qualities. "You'll have the rest of your appointment schedule tomorrow morning," he promised.

In his room, Stone took off the one-sleeved jacket and his shirt and dropped them on the floor. When he had cleaned and reloaded the Luger, he put it next to him on an end table and sat staring out of the window at the orange sun setting. He saw the hair on his left arm and hand had been singed.

He felt empty, drained. He closed his eyes. As he was about to slip off to sleep he heard a sound at the door and was instantly awake, alert and Luger in hand. In the semi-darkness he flattened himself against the wall next to the door until he heard a soft knock repeated twice and the sound of his name.

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"Who is it?" he asked hoarsely.

"Townsend," came the answer.

Stone slid the bolt free, but held the Luger ready, safety off. Townsend pushed the door open, and Grout followed, flicking on the light switch as Stone flicked the Luger's safety catch back on. He bolted the door behind them and tucked the Luger back into his belt. Townsend's face and the big white square of adhesive tape over his cheekbone looked ominous.

"What happened to you?" Stone asked.

"I met your friend, and we had a disagreement," Townsend said, wincing as he tried to grin. "But officially I walked into a door."

"Then it *was* you up on the hill?"

Townsend mock-bowed. "Let's sit," he said, "I'm feeling a little woozy."

Townsend and Grout sat down and Stone brought his whisky bottle and glasses, and poured them each triples.

"Your description, the totem-pole, was good, Mr. Stone. I recognised him immediately."

Stone realised that, like himself, Townsend was all wound up, and talking almost feverishly. Grout just sat there, his white sheared head bent over his bourbon, his eyes hooded.

Without transition, Townsend asked, "Did you get it?"

"Get what?"

"Don't let's play games. Karst's manuscript, of course."

Grout began to gesticulate, pointing to the walls and then to his ears. Townsend looked at him indifferently.

"There was no manuscript," Stone replied, deliberately disregarding Grout's pantomime and shocked face. If Decani was tapping this, then let him hear that.

Grout stood up. "Let's not drink up all Mr. Stone's whisky, Michael," he said smoothly. "Let's have another downstairs in the bar."

Townsend stood too. "This is no game, Mr. Stone."

Reaching over, Stone picked his jacket from the floor and held it so Townsend could see the charred edges of the sleeveless shoulder. "I know," Stone retorted icily.

"We'll wait for you in the bar," Townsend said, hostile. There was no mistaking the fact that he thought he was giving an order.

"You do that," Stone said.

The shower made him feel better. He shaved again, changed his clothes, and took his time doing it all. Let Townsend wait! His watch said he still had an hour and a half before

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he was to meet Eleanor Hvar, and the thought of that cheered him even more. He rechecked the Luger, took two extra clips for it, and put them into his breast pockets.

At the hotel desk, Stone found a note from Eleanor Hvar asking him to meet her at a Balkan Restaurant with an address that Stone quickly confirmed from the porter's map as being near the Danube. The envelope in which it had come looked irregularly sealed so that it might have been steamed open and reglued.

Townsend and Grout were waiting in the bar. As soon as Stone was seated Townsend began to speak slowly and very distinctly as if he had rehearsed every word. The interval had obviously given him time to bring himself under some control and to reconsider his method—that, and perhaps some advice from Grout. "Mr. Stone," Townsend began, "I can't order you to give Karst's manuscript to me, but as an American, I think you'd want it to be in the right hands."

"Yours?" Stone asked.

"No, not mine, the American Government's."

"So far as I know the Government is not yet a commercial publisher."

"That manuscript is of prime political importance."

"Mr. Townsend, I don't have a manuscript. Karst didn't give me one. If he had, I doubt I'd give it to you."

"But why?"

"For one thing it wouldn't be mine to give. If someone gave me a manuscript in trust to publish, I'd have to see that the manuscript was protected, published as the author instructed."

"Then Karst *did* give you instructions."

"Look, Townsend, I'm tired and I'm not very long on patience right now. Three attempts on my life have been made in the past two days and the last one came pretty close. *I have no manuscript of Karst's.*"

"I saved your life up there today—" Townsend took another tack. "You know that."

"I'm grateful, very grateful."

"You don't show it."

"You saved my life because you thought I had Karst's book. So did Decani. By your logic, I ought to show my appreciation by giving both of you the manuscript."

"We want that manuscript," Townsend repeated stubbornly. "We want it and we propose to get it."

"I wish you luck."

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"And you're going to co-operate..."

"...Michael!" Grout said warningly.

"This is a matter of the gravest national interest," Townsend cried. "You literary wise guys meddling in political things you don't have the first clue about...it's time we taught you a few things."

"Townsend, let me tell you this. I'm tired of your stupid attempts to bribe, bully and blackmail me. And I'm tired of your presumption that you're the sole guardian and arbiter of the national interest. I've had about as much of you as I'm going to take politely."

Townsend stood up, his fingers touching the white adhesive on his cheekbone. "Goodnight, Mr. Stone," he said. "Are you coming, Max?"

Grout raised his eyes, his face non-committal. "Not just yet, Michael. I think I'll stay and talk to Mr. Stone."

Townsend flushed. "Very well. As you wish. Goodnight, then." He turned on his heel and stalked out.

Grout sloshed the whisky in his glass, listening to the clink of the ice. "You've just made yourself a powerful enemy, Warren."

"I didn't ask for it."

"And lost yourself a powerful ally."

"Do you know a Balkan Restaurant down near the Danube?" Stone asked, to change the subject.

"Yes, why?"

"I have a dinner date there in a while and I wondered what kind of place it was."

"Posh hangout for tourists and Party bigwigs," Grout said. "Look, I'm not holding you up, am I?"

Stone looked at his watch. "No, I've got some time yet."

"Good. I'd like to talk for a bit and then, if you like, I can give you a lift down. My car's outside."

"Fine."

"Warren," Grout said after a pause, "I'm not going to apologise for Michael Townsend. He's got a job to do and he's doing it his way. I don't happen to work that way so I'll try it from another angle. Whatever a man like Karst writes is not only a literary matter, it's a political matter. Karst is the rare Communist who has actually held top-leadership positions and, therefore, has top-leadership information—or what they call state secrets. He has broken with them and remains alive to talk about it. Some months back, Karst turned in his Party card, openly.

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"Now what's at stake, Warren? First, what happens to this country. Does it go East or West? That's a very important matter in the present balance of power, and what Karst writes about us and the Russians might be an important factor in tilting that balance. And therefore we have orders to get that book."

"Whatever was in such a book would not be likely to harm us."

"We can't take that chance," Grout said.

"I still don't have any book, Maxim," Stone declared.

"I'm sure you don't. Karst is no fool. But he might have, probably did, tell you where to find it. Decani will guess as much. Even Michael will realise that in a day or two. The others, the ones Decani tells me are Soviet agents, will know that too. They'll all be watching you like hawks, they won't let you out of their sight, and..."

"...I know, Maxim, this is no game. I'd better be very careful," Stone said sarcastically.

"As a matter of fact, Warren, I wasn't going to say that. You're in this game now and you're the kind that will stick it to the end. I don't think you were before you saw Karst, but something has changed in you. Before, you wanted simply to be left alone, but now you've made it your business. Of that I'm certain."

How Grout could be so sure Stone couldn't understand. He wasn't altogether sure himself. Just why he had come so far in commitment in so short a time, he couldn't say. All the things that had happened to him and to the others he had met, among whom Grout, himself, was no small factor, were part of it.

Grout drove him to the Balkan Restaurant in a big, black American car with diplomatic licence plates. During the ride Stone lay back, eyes closed, thinking that the real thing was to get the manuscripts out of the country. Townsend wouldn't send them out by diplomatic bag anyway; Decani, being the kind of man he was, would search him thoroughly at the border no matter what. The others, whoever *they* were, would still try to kill him because to them any manuscript was secondary to what Karst might have told him.

There was no other course open to him. He'd have to go to Dubrovnik—to try it Karst's way.

◆ ***The Last Part of The Thousand Doors appears in next month's Argosy—on sale 9 July***

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FRANCE and Italy between them produce more than half the world's supply of wine. The finest vintage wines can be found in Britain, often cheaper than they are in France. What cannot be found in Britain, because they do not travel well or are not an economical proposition in terms of demand, are the delightful "wines of the country" that every wine-growing area produces.

The moral, therefore, is to look for them on your continental holiday, and not bother about the fine wines that you can get at home, all the more so because many French waiters, outside the expensive restaurants, have not the first idea how to serve them. Chambrée is a French word, but it has no significance for them. They open the bottle, dump it on the table, and leave you to it.

Many of the roads to the south-west pass through the valley of the Loire, the country of green fields, placid rivers and lovely châteaux. Among the wines to look for here, are Alouette Anjou Rosé, the rich, fully perfumed Chinon, and the red Bourgueil, which has a "nose" of raspberries.

For those driving south-east, the champagne area is the first major wine-growing area reached.

Beyond it lies Alsace, full of young delightful white wines—perfect drinking on a hot summer's day. The Rieslings are well-bred wines, and for those who like a muscat wine the Vosges is the place to go.

To the south and nearer to Switzerland is the Jura, where the wines have a character all their own. The best known are the Marnebour, red, white and rosé. Expensive, but a very special aperitif, is Château-Chalon, for there is nothing quite like it, or as a liqueur wine, Grand Vin de Paille du

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Jura. The grapes are dried on straw, and the wine is kept in cask for ten years before bottling. It is like an Imperial Tokay.

The wines of the Rhône, Bordeaux and Burgundy are well-known here. It is worth looking out for the white Beaujolais and the white Châteauneuf du Pape. Round Cahors, the famous "Black Wine" can be found.

In Spain and Portugal almost every district has its local wines. In Portugal the best aperitif is a white port, chilled, and very pleasant. The best red wine in Spain is the Marques de Riscal claret, and Portugal has a very dry red wine—Vila Real Tinto.

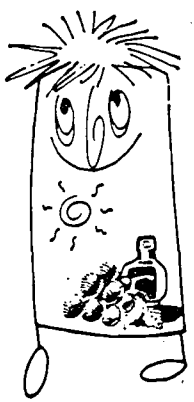
In Germany the local wines are sold from the wood, and often served in the familiar steins, or pottery tankards. Though very easy to drink on a hot day, their strength is deceptive. The safe principle in Germany, as in Austria and Switzerland, is to drink what the restaurant or café has to offer, for the locals will not tolerate bad wine.

There is hardly a single province in Italy that does not make its wine, but the hot sun tends to produce a rough type. Some pleasant white wines are grown in the Verona-Venice area, and red or white Chianti from Tuscany is a sound bet. Soave is the wine for sea-food, Barolo for roast meats. But in Italy beware of the wine in the small café or trattoria drawn from the cask or large flagon. It is wiser to pay a little more for a bottle. The most economical aperitif is an Americano.

Yugoslavia exports the best of her white wines, but the better hotels stock the sound and very drinkable Riesling from the Lutomer region, one of the world's oldest wine-growing areas. The favourite aperitif is Slivovitz.

In Greece it is Ouzo, somewhat similar to Pernod, and drunk with ice and water. Retsina is the favourite national wine, but you have to like a flavour of resin. If Ouzo and Retsina are not to your fancy, there is plenty of honest white wine and some red with a definite personality.

J.B.W.



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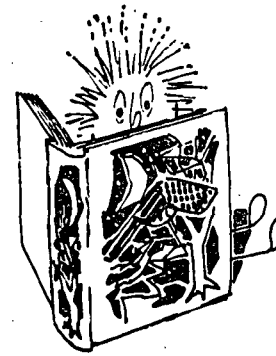

bookshelf

THE year was 1814, a few months before the Battle of Waterloo. Lord Cochrane was thirty-nine, tall with fiery hair and arresting looks, well known as a brave and resourceful officer of the King's Navy.

In April, Cochrane was indicted with five others at the Old Bailey, accused of fraud. Earlier in the year a man in a splendid scarlet uniform and tokens of high rank had brought wonderful news from France—Napoleon was dead, he said; the French defeated. These glad tidings reached the London Stock Exchange early the following morning and Government securities immediately started to rise.

Cochrane, at this time a Member of Parliament, was a large shareholder and made what we would call a killing to the tune of about £2,500, a very handsome sum in those days, before the hoax was discovered.

The charge against him was fraudulent conspiracy... that Lord Cochrane, his uncle and his friends had engineered for their own gain the false rumour, using a man of doubtful reputation called Berenger disguised as a French officer for this cheat.

This is the story told by Henry Cecil in his cleverly titled book *A Matter of Speculation.* The evidence is presented with complete impartiality and the reader is asked to pronounce his verdict before the result of the trial is known. The whole thing is fascinating. (Hutchinson, 25s.)

A revised and enlarged edition of E. S. Turner's *The Shocking History of Advertising* is brimming over with oddities and information. For instance, when it all started—way, way back, the gladiatorial shows were placarded all over the

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walls of Rome; the Elizabethans, who doted on monsters, were tempted by handbills advertising the attractions of the fair, such as "a male child born with a bear growing on his back alive" and "a woman with three breasts, an admirable work of nature." None other than the Merrie Monarch, King Charles, was advertising in 1660: "We must call upon you again for a Black Dog, between a greyhound and a spaniel, no white about him, only a streak, on his Brest, and Tayl a little bobbed. It is His Majesties own Dog, and doubtless was stolen for the Dog was not born or bred in England, and would never forsake his Master. Whosoever findes him may acquaint any at Whitehal, for the Dog is better known at Court than those who stole him..."

And where today would a maiden in distress find such a paragon of a tradesman? "Morning Post 1772. Ladies may be accommodated to lie-in, where care, tenderness, humanity, honour and secrecy may be depended on. Inquire of Mr. Jenkins, grocer, Rathbone Place."

The Shocking History of Advertising is a very enjoyable, engrossing account of a most profitable profession from its earliest manifestations up to the present day. (Penguin, 5s.)

Once again Anthony Boucher edits that excellent collection *Best American Stories of the Year* to which Patricia Highsmith and Romain Gary both make outstanding contributions. There is an Ellery Queen and a frightening tale from Borden Deal of a man trapped into tracking down a very strange animal. Michael Gilbert, a favourite with readers of Argosy, is in with one of his Mr. Behrens, special agent extraordinary, stories. (Boardman, 16s.)

Aphrodisiacs in Your Garden by Charles Connell is good for a laugh, though the joke wears a bit thin after a few chapters. The author says the book is intended for everyone with an interest in sex and the possibilities of making it even more agreeable than it undoubtedly is.

Nor need the garden you set out to cultivate be a large one: the chapter headed "A box where sweets compacted lie" concerns putting to better use the window box or small plot of the ordinary suburban home. (Incidentally, wouldn't the austere George Herbert be surprised to discover a line of his verse used in this context!).

The illustrations, by Quentin Blake, are a joy. (Arthur Barker, 18s.)

J.D.

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man about cars

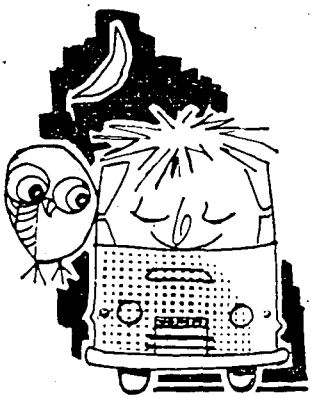
IS it the man or the car or both? I have often asked myself. So it was with even more interest than usual that I slipped the key into the door of the sleek white Saab Sports —now I could find out for myself how much is Saab, and how much is Eric Carlsson.

Settling into the driving seat, I found the controls and instruments neatly laid out behind and around the wood-rimmed steering wheel, with the ever-important rev counter in full view. At my side, the passenger seat with its head-rest looked invitingly comfortable; the car generally seemed well and tastefully furnished.

The only point to which I could take exception was the steering column gear change—an impression borne out over the next five or six hundred miles.

The Saab is, by British standards, slightly unconventional. We are by now used to front-wheel drive, but as yet two-stroke engines have not found their way under British bonnets, let alone two-stroke engines with only 3 cylinders. The Saab Sports takes this a step farther by providing one carburettor for each cylinder.

The body styling is slightly odd to look at, but has obviously been influenced by the makers' experience in aircraft design.



Flat out, wind noise is virtually non-existent; in fact, at high speed the whole car is uncannily quiet.

Starting from cold was normally quite easy, but the engine took a little while to warm up and run evenly—despite the radiator blind, operated very sensibly from inside the car.

Once firing well, the Saab Sports becomes great fun to drive, although it takes a short time to get used to the narrow rev range at which power

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is delivered. Anything under about 3,400 r.p.m. is very sluggish and at 6,000 r.p.m. it runs sharply out of breath, so gear changes are quite critical.

And on the test run, I found the four-speed gear change is not as smooth as it might be. In open country, where top and third are in use, the Saab Sports is superb—clinging to the road on bends both in the wet and on dry surfaces in an incredible way, which explains why the rally performances of the Saab are so exceptional.

In town, however, the rather stiff change into second and transmission snatch makes driving less of a pleasure. The use of the free wheel device makes for much smoother progress.

I could not help feeling at times the need for a smooth, close-ratio five-speed gear box.

Comfort in the front is superb, with fully reclining Reutter seats which even have an adjustable cushion for the small of the back and, on the passenger side, a padded headrest which is a luxury.

At the rear, however, rather thin squabs resting on ply covers are much more suited to passengers with a tough rear.

Space for luggage and bits and pieces is quite phenomenal for a car of this size: apart from the king-size boot, there are numerous lockers, pockets and cubby holes to accommodate everything and anything.

For long-distance, high-speed motoring, the Saab Sports is a delight.

The lack of noise and the smoothness of the two-stroke engine, combined with the comfort of the front seats, enable one to put up high averages without the usual tiredness and strain.

For knocking around town, though, it is less satisfactory, and even an experienced driver takes some time to get used to its different ways.

Petrol consumption was high for the engine capacity of 841 c.c., being around 22 m.p.g., though this could be improved upon considerably in touring conditions, when it was nearer 30 m.p.g.

Top speed is around 85 m.p.h. and it takes just over 12 seconds to reach 50 m.p.h. which is not bad going in any car.

The Saab Sports is the sort of car you either love or hate, and most Saab owners seem to love theirs. You can see how you feel for £1,138, including purchase tax.

K.F.

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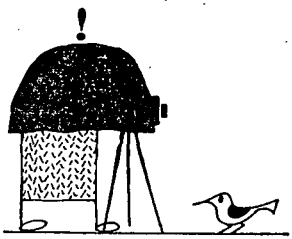
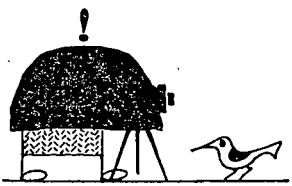
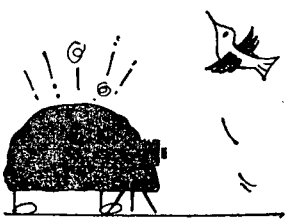
Man with a Camera







FEW people will possess a camera for long without wanting to try colour photography. In fact more and more people buy cameras for the sole purpose of taking colour. The two questions most often asked are: "Is it difficult?" and "Is it expensive?"

It is true that at one time colour photography was difficult for the amateur and it usually called for an expensive camera. But now, with the introduction of inexpensive cameras with colour corrected lens and colour film of increased speed, it has been brought within the scope of almost everyone.

There are only two main types of colour film. One is for making transparencies, and can be viewed in a pocket viewer or projected on to a screen. The other is for producing negatives for colour prints. It is possible to use one film for two jobs, since you can have prints made from colour transparencies, but generally it is better to use negative film when prints are required.

Transparencies can cost as little as 11d. a shot, mounted in cardboard frames for viewing or projecting.

The advantage of colour prints is that no viewer is necessary and unlimited prints and enlargements can be made from the one negative.

With colour film particularly, do not go for a mass of different colours in your picture, just because the scene looks bright and colourful to the eye.

The result will be disappointing and you will wonder why. It is better to isolate your colour, if you can,

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or try to balance a large area of one colour with one or two points of contrasting colours. For example—two people in, say, a red and a yellow dress would look better taken against a plain blue sky, or a plain sunny wall, than against a flower bed, shrubs or a confusion of chairs, tables and sunshades.

Practically all cameras nowadays, even the least expensive, are fitted for the use of flash, and it is just as easy to take flash pictures as ordinary daylight shots.

There are two types of flash systems: electronic, and expendable bulb units.

The electronic flash incorporates a tube which will operate thousands of times without changing. The speed of the actual flash is about 1/500 to 1/1,000th. sec., a great advantage when photographing animals or children, as it will stop almost any movement.

The colour of electronic flash is the same as daylight, and so can be used with daylight colour films indoors without extra filters. The initial cost is a little expensive (from about 12 gns.), but the running costs are low: the average cost per flash is about ½d. These units require no maintenance, and are recharged by means of a mains charger supplied with the unit.

It is important to remember that shutter speed plays no part in the exposure, with electronic flash, as obviously the speed of the flash is faster than most shutter speeds, so you merely set the speed at about 1/60th and adjust the lens aperture according to the distance of the subject—the instructions are usually on the back of the unit.

The expendable bulb units are much cheaper to buy than electronic units (prices are from about £2, and they work from small batteries) but running costs are higher, since the bulbs can be used only once.

A packet of five bulbs costs about 3s. 9d. It is important to remember that *clear* bulbs are used for black and white films, and *blue* bulbs for colour films.

Exposures are simple to calculate. On the bulb carton you will obtain what is called a Guide Number (this varies with different film speeds). This number is divided by the distance in feet between the flash unit and the subject, and the result will be the correct aperture, e.g. Guide Number 60, subject 10 ft. away, aperture setting would be f/6.

The Guide Number or Flash Factor system is used, of course, for electronic flash as well.

C.B.

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ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month

ACROSS

1 Lucky call makes for advantage (3–3–4).

6 Takes three to make a riot! (4).

9 Alan dreams about a spirit of fire? (10).

10 Put tops back in place (4).

12 Got a purchase and opened it (6).

14 Take it easy with a horse! (5).

17 "The blood-red blossom of ——" (Tennyson) (3).

18 Revolves—not just for the record (9).

21 Bonnet-string—essential for a wedding! (5).

22 She moves with a certain elegance (5).

23 Embarrassed in hospital, but comfortable? (3–2–4).

25 She often gets fleeced! (3).

26 A set of opinions (5).

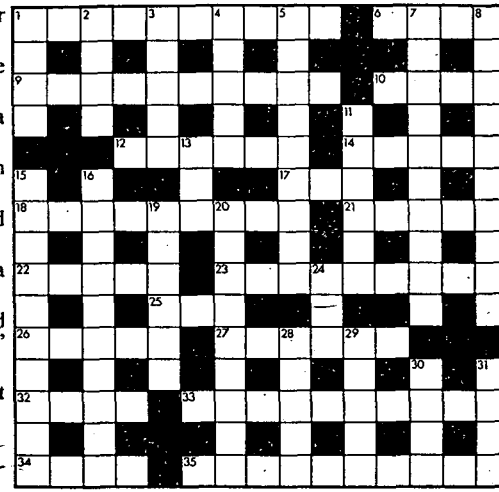
27 It's attractive but cheap (6).

32 A 13 in opera (4).

33 Good reason —for having fun (10).

34 Worker deals this on the side (4).

35 Want to compete in race? Step this way, then! (4–3–3).



DOWN

1 "—— to the Golden Gate" (Kipling) (4).

2 Meandering line of water (4).

3 It's the poet's pigeon! (5).

4 Armoured vehicles (5).

5 Flower—with good wishes for the race? (9).

7 Undemocratic (10).

8 Quite honestly it's flat! (2–3–5).

11 Pub wager on a bird? (6).

13 I dated her first! (3).

15 Drama teacher making classic film? (5–5).

16 Third World War? (10).

19 These clothes suit us (6).

20 Barrister had it well in hand? (9).

24 The fool may be loaded (3).

28 Watery month (5).

29 Rhône wader? (5).

30 Artist's in pursuit? (4).

31 Cutter's in a daze (4).

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Further tributes to the LSJ were broadcast last year on January 28th, March 1st and October 20th.

A warning was given about the doubtful value of the claims made by certain schools. If you seek our advice, you will not be lured by lavish promises or bombarded with letters urging enrolment upon you. If you decide to become a member, you will work under a personal coach and your work will be fully criticised and returned promptly . . . no waiting for weeks or even months.

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